

State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
126 State Street
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Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting minutes

Friday, June 21, 2024 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Agency of Human Services
27 Federal Street, St. Albans, VT
And virtually

Commissioners present: Co-Chair Esther Charlestin, Co-Chair Sarah Mell, Heather Bouchey, Hazel Brewster, Kellie Campbell, Brenda Churchill, Alex Hilliard, Nancy Kaplan, Annie Mackin, Sophia Rabe, Kelly-Rue Riso, Linda Joy Sullivan, and Susan Sussman

Commissioners absent: Ashley Messier and Wendy Knight

Advisors present: Margaret Overman, VWW

Staff: Cary Brown, Ellie Lane, and Emily O'Hara

Presiding: Co-Chairs Esther Charlestin and Sarah Mell

Recording: Ellie Lane

1. Meeting called to order

Meeting called to order at **10:10 a.m.**

2. Approval of agenda and review Group Agreements

MOTION made by Nancy, seconded by Hazel

To approve the proposed amended meeting agenda, giving discretion to the chair to deviate from the agenda as necessary.

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

Review Group Agreements

3. Approval of May 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Hazel, seconded by Nancy

To approve the May 2024 minutes as submitted.

Heather abstained, as did Kellie Rue.

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes adopted.

4. Welcome & Introductions

Sarah asked everyone to introduce themselves and share what circus act they would be in a circus.

5. Staff Updates

Legal Rights of Women in Vermont

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Cary shared a little about the progress on the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont update project and posed some questions for Commissioners about what should be included and how it should be structured. Feedback Commissioners shared included:

- Education is very important to include. There is a lot of legalese in the education space.
- A suggestion to cross-reference age discrimination with employment law.
- Include Aging in Vermont as a topic.
- Advanced care directives, including what your rights are under those, for you and people for whom you care give, as well as health care proxies and HIPPA.
- Estate planning.
- A chapter on trans rights.
- Parental notification rights, both in terms of reproductive care and also health care.
- Gender-based violence and harassment, workers, etc.
- In chapter 3, add resources like WomenSafe, integrating the violence and family law sections potentially.
- Developmental opportunities for young adults. Engaging girls and women so they know they have resources. Resources for parents of girls. How to use this when advocating for youth.
- Include a chapter for teenagers, including emancipation, etc.
- Think about how we get this out to teens – gym teachers, health teachers, guidance counselors. Menstrual products in schools. Colab with Outright, HerStory, and youth-serving programs.
- Public benefits – maybe we don't need to include so much about this, there are better existing resources from DCF.
- Heather would like to join the working group. Brenda would like to help with Chapter 9.
- Virtually or in the print copy have a system of cross-referencing.
- Taking onto the refugee resettlement effort and it might be helpful to know what matters in process. Vermont refugee resettlement program and one in Brattleboro. Vermont Afghan Alliance.

Additional updates

Cary & Em attended Senator Welch's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference on June 8 and had a great experience. It was great to be in person – we used to do a lot of events like this but not so many since COVID. Em talked about the keynote on AI at the end and the realities about bias and the danger which was briefly mentioned at the end.

Em attended the Restorative Justice Conference and shared a bit about Act 11, which provides a path for restorative justice programs to be used in response to interpersonal violence.

Em talked about her new VIEW rollout, and our legislative update is coming out soon.

Alex talked about concerns about AI and gender-based violence and revenge porn.

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Sarah mentioned the Health Campuses and Workplaces Symposium in September at UVM:

<https://www.uvm.edu/dsc/vvpp-healthy-campuses-workplaces-symposium>

Expense claims

Ellie reminded folks about FY24 expense claims and asked for those by Monday.

6. Values-Setting

Cary shared the changes of the values that she came up with after our last meeting and asked for input. We don't need to vote, but would welcome input.

Margaret talked about the difficulty with acknowledging that we live in a world where these labels and affinity spaces matter, and the limitations of languages and definitions. Transparency is valuable in their work.

Rather than “our vision of women”, say “our work focuses on”.

7. Meeting schedule for FY2025

The group discussed the staff proposed meeting schedule for FY25. The idea is to have shorter VCW meetings with time for committee meetings during that block. Commissioner discussion included:

- What about a retreat in person? Some work lends itself really well to a retreat.
- What about public forums?
- Meetings during the day are hard for some of our Commissioners as well – could we do evenings?
- Some people attend as part of their work day – there are folks who can do days more easily and folks who can do evenings more often.
- Follow-up on public forums
- Explicitly naming that children are welcome in laps, in backgrounds, getting up to eat, etc.
- Advisory council members are available to participate.
- We should consider the accessibility of meeting times and locations for members of the public and for Commissioners – not just for who is at the table but who we want to be here.

MOTION made by Nancy, seconded by Esther

to schedule a retreat for the third Friday in September, in person in Montpelier with a remote option
Sarah abstained.

MOTION APPROVED.

MOTION made by Kellie, seconded by Alex.

To approve the remaining FY25 meeting schedule as proposed by staff with the understanding that we will discuss this more in September and we can make changes in then as necessary.

Sarah abstained.

MOTION APPROVED.

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8. Staff/commissioner/advisor updates

VWW is finishing up Trailblazers in Newport. They will be in Brattleboro next. Rosies Girls and high schools programs starting next week for summer. Summer bookclub for gender equity group is launching this summer. They might be reading Who's Afraid of Gender? VWW is hiring, a Senior Program Manager position.

Kellie shared free camps happening at Vermont State Colleges. <https://vermontstate.edu/youth-camps-at-vermont-state/>

<https://events.govtech.com/Vermont-Digital-Government-Summit>

Vermont Digital Government Summit, Cary to moderate a few panels.

Kellie interviewed with CIO News and got a chance to highlight work we are doing and work VWW is doing.

Esther thanked Sarah for their work on the Commission and talked about how valuable they have been to VCW and presented Sarah with a thank you bouquet.

9. Public Forum

In attendance:

Philly A

Hannah McMann, Voices Against Violence

Hannah Issacs, Voices Against Violence

Jan, a retired DCF employee

Martha Synder, Voices Against Violence, All About Kids

Kate, Hope Grove Recovery

Winnie Wilkinson, Vendors in the Park

Sarah introduced themselves, welcomed folks, and gave a brief overview of the Commission and our work and members of the public engaged in a dialogue about our work.

Winnie talked about Juneteenth this week, and would like to address the level of misinformation and assumptions about Juneteenth and what it is. Heard stuff like "another day for ** to barbeque". Education that we all should intentionally address. Comments about hairstyles, a lack of knowledge about African American women here. Series of informational events, information. Creating opportunities for black women to tell others who they are.

Kate shared the way people talk about people in recovery is really offensive. It's really hard to stay sober. An "us vs. them" feeling. Need for education. Housing issues as a mom in recovery. The system of care for people is lacking. Lost 100 beds for long-term care in Franklin County. Having to move people out of

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their counties. Lost a friend recently, and thinking about how many folks who have died because they couldn't get care. We need a house here. Charges that keep people from employment. Differences in road back to medical licensing from nursing to doctors etc.

Jan shared that Franklin county always comes last for resources because people can go to Burlington. We get a taste of things but not the continuum. We have a mens sober house but not for women. The thought that everyone wants to go live in a 55+ community. The volunteer force is principally older women. Homeowner privilege and so many people unhoused in our community and struggling to be in treatment. People who are struggling are part of this community.

Bias and discrimination in access to services. More public engagement.

At All About Kids – serving moms who are non-custodial parents, the judges here as well as some DCF staff are unforgiving when women have a history of incarceration or substance use, but men are allowed to make mistakes. One woman said she never drank until they took her children away. Watching her disintegrate. Lack of dental care for people.

For teenage girls, the expectations are different than for their male counterparts. There aren't the supports they need to become empowered young women. They have used what they have available to meet their needs, and that's not acceptable. Girls coming into custody for very different reasons.

Nothing that helps parents that are part of the system who are in recovery that helps parents learn to parent together. Helping dads to be healthier parents.

There have been programs, but they aren't happening anymore.

There is a Caring Dads program in Bennington, but we don't have funding to be able to offer parent time coaching or nurturing parent time. The power DCF holds. Have applied for a new grant called Healing Together, together with supervised visitation. Doing art projects to heal from trauma.

Substance abuse, housing is really needed. Lack of education around Black history in public schools – education is needed.

Access to internet is really challenging. Many programs are online but having access to private internet is very difficult for people who are unhoused or low income.

Meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.