

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 8, 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Kellie Campbell, Mary Daly, Emilie Kornheiser, Kim Nolan, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Ryan, Kerry Secrest, Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Nancy Brooks, Lisa Carlson, Charlotte Dennett, Erica Hare, Marcia Merrill

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA-Vermont
Karen Tronsgard-Scott of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Alison Lamagna and Rhoni Basden of Vermont Works for Women
Amy Russo-Perler and Charlie Gliserman of Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Gwen Pokalo of Center for Women and Enterprise
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids
Katherine Vose of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Burlington Chapter
Lisa Falcone of Mercy Connections
Pat Heffernan of Women Business Owner's Network

Guests: Brynn Connell, VCW Intern from UVM, Celia Gottlieb, VCW Intern from Middlebury College

Staff: Anna Brouillette, Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions

Lisa welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. Approval of March Meeting Minutes

Approval of March 2020 Minutes

MOTION made by **Mary**, seconded by **Marybeth**:

To approve the March 2020 minutes as submitted.

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY ROLL CALL VOTE. Adopted as presented.

3. Updates from community partners re: COVID-19, with discussion

Marybeth Redmond/Emilie Kornheiser, VT House of Representatives

Emilie – Regarding the data collection work along with Change The Story, she is no longer on the Committee and will rethink strategy. She's now serving on Ways and Means.

Marybeth – Excited that Emilie is on Ways and Means now. It's really a wonderful thing to be on one of the most powerful Committees. Vermont delegation is doing a great job in Washington. Vermont is

receiving a higher percentage of money than we usually do, we usually get 0.2%, in parts of this stimulus it is 0.8%. They are working to ensure personal protective equipment (PPE) is getting into the state and to everyone who needs it. DAIL is having massive challenges in that home care workers can't go into people's homes, and that's putting pressure on families to provide additional care.

Legislative Committee meetings are on YouTube now, and that increases transparency.

What about the housing protection bill? It is being taken up by the Senate today. It cleared the House. The Senate will be in Montpelier to approve remote voting, and then that bill is top of the list. It does not offer respite on rents and mortgages but prevents evictions during the pandemic. We're noticing and realizing that we need to take care of our IT systems. With the one-time money coming in, she will be pushing for us to refocus on that.

Jen Horwitz, Let's Grow Kids

Let's Grow Kids (LGK) is focused on ensuring all VT families have access to high-quality, affordable child care by 2025. They are pivoting their work to support the early care community during this pandemic. Getting providers serving essential personnel sanitizing supplies, PPE, etc. For programs that have closed, LGK is working with them to help them be able to re-open. Vermont is a leader in offering stabilization payments, up to 50% of tuition or CCFAP co-payment, and families asked to pay 50%. There is some specific guidance about how this works. If families pay their half of tuition or CCFAP co-payment, then they receive 50% from VT. If the family can pay something, the program can work with the family. If the family cannot pay anything, the child must be unenrolled from the program for the state to offer reimbursement to the provider. That means the spot may be lost. Families can apply for CCFAP now if income has changed.

LGK offers a COVID-19 Resource page, for employers, families, child care providers. They are working to make sure that the resources needed are going to be in place, and to build a comprehensive set of resources, including making sure programs have access to capital in many ways.

Meredith Roberts, American Nurses Association - VT

VT's high-risk patients, largely patients over 60 make up a large percentage of our population. 176,000 adults are at high risk. The American Nurses Association and a group of others collaborated on a statement in response to the crisis.

Meredith discussed the situation on the ground for nurses

The nurses need proper PPE to protect themselves and families, Meredith shared quotes and survey results illustrating how bad the situation on the ground is. They will continue to be involved and prepared to help.

Gwen Pokalo, Center for Women & Enterprise, home to Vermont Women's Business Center

The Center for Women in Enterprise (CWE) offers business planning programs and support. In Vermont, they support 500 women a year. In light of COVID-19, while there are not yet state-specific business resources, there are two SBA programs, IDLE and the paycheck protection program, which is a forgivable

loan if the funds are used for payroll over the next 8 weeks. This is administered through banks and has had some problems. Many business owners don't have a banking relationship, and they are having challenges accessing this program.

The Vermont Department of Labor is doing an amazing job trying to get information out.

Amazing creativity is being demonstrated by our women business owners. They are creating deep connections.

Pat Heffernan, Women's Business Owner's Network (WBON)

If members cannot find the answer they are looking for, or have a specific question, member email WBON and also have peer to peer support. WBON relies on a number of the groups that are on this call, as well as to members who have had similar experiences.

Lisa Ryan, VCW Commissioner, and Rutland County Community Justice Center

Offering updates regarding incarceration in Vermont. Calling attention to the recent VPR piece about the inconsistent access to soap and hand sanitizer in the facilities. They are reducing populations, more than 200 people have been released in the last two weeks. These were mostly cases where the incarcerated person was approaching their minimum or had committed low misdemeanor crimes.

The local NAACP chapter is signing onto an ACLU letter regarding getting more information about incarcerated populations and those who have COVID in Vermont and in prisons where we house Vermonters. That includes asking for data by gender and race, so we can keep track. There are health disparities in that people of color are contracting this disease at a higher rate and dying at a higher rate.

Race plays a huge roll in this pandemic, and this can't be ignored.

Karen Tronsgard-Scott, VT Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

The Network's 15 member organizations are still open for business and providing services. Some of these are being provided in different ways, but they are open and answering the phones. There are people in shelter, and those people continue to be served. In almost every one of the organizations, the ED is the one visiting shelters, while their staff stay home. Shelter capacity has decreased in some cases because recommendations don't allow shared bathrooms. They are moving highly vulnerable adults out of the shelter and into hotel rooms. Congregate housing for folks testing positive. This is a great idea generally but isn't ideal for DV survivors.

There are parts of the state where the hotel rooms are filled, Franklin, Grand Isle. For right now, the calls to hotlines have decreased. In a few places they've increased, but in most places, the requests for services have decreased. When we look at other disasters, it is not unusual for things to be quiet right now. Survivors are trying to figure these things out just like the rest of us. They don't have the bandwidth or the personal space to call. What we anticipate is that they will call, towards the end of isolation, and once we are invited to come back into the communities. This will happen at about the same time as we see the economic impact on programs. Funds that come in through state fees and charges are drying up. Working with the Center for Crime Victim Services on adopting flexibility.

Sexual Assault survivors who go to the hospital have advocates via telephone only, and SANE exams continue.

She is terribly worried about what happens if this workforce starts to get ill. The Network is making plans for covering hotlines, sharing duties, Network staff refreshing training to be able to fill in. DV organizations need funding. Spending a lot of money on food, supplies they never anticipated. There are no masks or gloves available to survivors.

Courts are kind of open, working with them to solidify consistency across the state for access to protection orders. Advocates are often not being allowed into the Courtroom due to limitations on the number in the Courtroom. Suspended notarization requirement, because they aren't available.

Lisa Senecal suggested that folks add the local shelters to the list of programs to keep supporting.

SafeSpace at the Pride Center is really hurting right now.

Allison Lamagna – Vermont Works for Women (VWW)

VWW did support over 40 women released from CRCF in the past few weeks, has been participating in release plans and providing care packages. They are keeping in touch with as many as possible. This is a difficult time to re-enter. Gas, grocery cards needed for these women. Along with CTS, VWW is looking at how this crisis impacts women.

4. VCW research into COVID-19 impacts on Vermonters

There is a spreadsheet going with specific questions we want to answer, specifically about data we need to collect. The Vermont Department of Health just published a new dashboard, which has some information broken down by sex. Asking folks to revisit that spreadsheet and add questions. Anna will be working on gathering that data.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:35 p.m.