

State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
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Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 14th 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting via video and teleconferencing

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell,
Mary Daly, Wendy Knight, Sarah Mell, Ashley Messier, Kim
Nolan, Heidi Tringe, Lisa Ryan

Commissioners absent:

Lisa Carlson, Kerin Durfee, Erica
Hare, Kiah Morris

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts, ANA Vermont
Dan Brown, Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Jen Horwitz & Logan Booker, Let's Grow Kids
Katie Salina, Let's Grow Kids
Karen Tronsgard-Scott of Vermont Network

Guests:

Al Johnson-Kurts, Change The Story Vermont

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome and Opening

Meeting called to order at 9:35 a.m.

Lisa Senecal welcomed everyone. Lisa Ryan led grounding and convening.

2. Approve minutes of March 2021

MOTION made by Lisa R, seconded by Kellie:

To approve the March 2021 minutes as submitted.

Hearing no nays, the motion is unanimously passed.

3. Announcements

Meredith Roberts announced that ANA VT is launching RNConnect, and has their legislative day coming up on April 23rd.

Jen announced she'll be out over the summer and introduced Katie, LGK's new Policy Research Analyst, who will attend VCW meetings while Jen is out.

Sarah announced that WaGE had their event with Ashley Messier which went very well. Today, the VT Senate is voting on the gay/trans panic bill vote, which has gotten contentious.

Lisa S. is visiting Salt Lake City to see her son graduate in May.

Kellie shifted into a new role as CIO for Vermont State Colleges. The State Colleges are soliciting feedback and here is a space to share your thoughts: <https://www.vsc.edu/transformation/>

Kim is considering putting together a bearing witness event for BIPOC & also for Abenaki folks around sacred lands & eugenics and is welcoming input.

Wendy Knight has taken a new role as Deputy Commissioner of Liquor & Lottery and is thrilled to be staying on the Commission.

4. Staff updates

Cary shared that we're watching the gay/trans panic defense bill. We're also a member of the Menstrual Equity Coalition, and are following bills to provide menstrual supplies in schools, in correctional facilities, and to eliminate the sales tax on them; S.53 has passed in the Senate and is now in House Ways & Means. It sounds like it may make it through that Committee. There is a constitutional argument that this tax is illegal, in that taxing menstrual supplies is a proxy for sex. The proposal to include supplies in schools is moving through as part of a larger bill. The current bill addressing supplies in correctional facilities wouldn't address the problem because it just says that supplies will be provided, but not how.

Today, Senate Government Operations is discussing H.122, Boards & Commissions that changes our statute. It would eliminate the requirement that the Governor can only appoint up to four members from any one party. If/when this passes, the Governor can appoint as many of their 8 appointees of one party as they like, and would ensure no more than 4 Commissioners can be legislators, and additionally ensures that only 2 of either the Speaker's or the Committee on Committee's appointees who are legislators can be of the same political party. It also eliminates our anti-lobbying provision, which is the only one we're aware of in state government.

Paid Family & Medical Leave won't be moving this year. The FaMLI coalition is focused on federal efforts.

The VT National Guard has issued its annual report on sexual violence and presented that to the legislature.

The legislature is working to address the need for updating the women's prison. There was a study done on some possible ways to approach the need to modernize and update the infrastructure of the whole system. They have presented several options, all of which involve closing CRCF and building a new women's facility, as well as additional re-entry facilities for both women and men.

Some of the points raised in the discussion among commissioners and advisors included:

- a few things are missing from the conversation. It is focused on facility construction. Programming should be part of the conversation, but I am weary. Programming & support should be available in our communities. Part of the options should be community alternatives, and it's interesting to see that hasn't been a part of the conversation. Regardless of whether they build a new facility, we need additional community supports. The population can and should be trending down as we dedicate efforts to decarcerate. 1.5 million dedicated to studying building new facilities, but not to what the alternatives might be. There is a lot of attention paid to the facility in Maine, but the women who live there have a different perspective than the Maine Correctional folks.
- the report was offered yesterday, and a couple of things happened in the hearing. Rep. Emmons stated that she wants to see the men's facilities be well on their way before they do anything with CRCF. If we wait for the men's facilities to be framed out and built, we're looking at 10 years. There were good questions asked about the number of beds. We've spent the last year plus doing justice reinvestment about reducing the number of beds and reinvesting that money into the community. The report that was offered was done in a vacuum and misses the investment we've made in justice reinvestment. It's troubling that this report was done without consultation of contractors & the folks who are impacted. With the Incarcerated Women's Initiative in the early 2000s we saw a large increase in the number of women incarcerated. With DV, substance abuse, etc., criminally involved women's lives present as more complex and judges are often apt to send them to prison so they have access to programming. We should make investments in keeping folks out of prison in the first place. Once built, there will be no going back.
- we appear to be planning for failure in criminal justice reform - is there an opportunity to interrupt the building plan. Why is there no representation from those impacted?
- It goes against the data and the initiatives put in place in VT; it goes against the national trend as well. VCW could ask for stakeholders to be part of each study. WJFI is asking for a portion of funding for a study group about alternatives. Those concerned should contact legislators in Corrections and Institutions and Joint Justice Oversight Committees.
- there is an opportunity to interrupt this. The conversation about decarceration, community resources & alternatives is happening nationally. We're talking about 50 – 70 million just to start for one facility. We could be doing so much better for our communities with this money. The Commission could be asking these questions about representation and making sure stakeholders and directly impacted people to be part of the process. Could we have a study committee on community alternatives? VCW could ask for this. We should be providing Vermonters with all of the options and having a conversation about what is best for our communities.
- our legislators respond to constituents' questions & concerns. There is a loophole going on, this work is centered in Corrections & Institutions. The Joint Justice Oversight Committee also has a voice here. Incarceration is the most intrusive & devastating thing that can happen. The role of

trauma in childhood & adulthood should not be overlooked. We could make more modest investments in keeping people out of prison, and in the long run, we could save millions & millions of dollars.

From the chat:

- <https://www.wjfi.org/> WFJI launched a No New Prisons campaign that you can learn more about on their website and social media Petition here: <https://www.change.org/p/phil-scott-no-new-prison-construction-in-vermont>
- Members of the Corrections and Institutions Committee: Alice Emmons, Sara Coffey, Mary Morrissey, Lynn Batchelor, Scott Campbell, Marcia Martel, Michael Morgan, Linda Joy Sullivan, Curt Taylor
- Sign up here to get notices from WJFI:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1v3zpsdwODedc87Ej_AXE7zwFIV2XlmdN5nmNFVy3Om8/vie/wform?edit_requested=true
- Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee: Dick Sears, Phil Baruth, Ginny Lyons, Corey Parent, Cheryl Hooker, Alice Emmons, Maxine Grad, Butch Shaw, Trevor Squirrel, Theresa Wood.

Cary shared that Change The Story is officially extended until March, 2022. We are working on a comprehensive evaluation about CTS.

Al shared that Change The Story is in the process of evaluating almost 700 records of events, communications, etc. to see what the impact of CTS has been over the past 6 years. In May, they will be moving into an interview-based evaluation phase that provides some evaluation about how well we've made an impact on Vermont's most marginalized communities and is working with a researcher from UVM.

Lilly shared that we are working with CTS partners to present an event in late May or early June to launch the new Pay Equity Playbook and tool, and will introduce the new tools. We're looking at recruiting an exciting keynote speaker to help get interest and press coverage.

We will be welcoming at least one intern, and possibly more this summer.

Lilly will be revamping our website in the new SOV template and would welcome input about what to include/not to include in the new version.

5. Committee Updates

Education & Human Development Committee: Kellie reintroduced the revised issues language for the Committee. Kellie shared the current and draft proposed language, for discussion and possible vote.

The point was made that “aspiration” is a word that doesn’t have a good translation for and is a construct that doesn’t exist in some indigenous cultures. The Committee removed that from the language.

**MOTION made by Kellie, seconded by Wendy:
to approve the revised language as we just reviewed for our website and other materials.
Hearing no nays, the motion is unanimously passed.**

Lisa Ryan shared that her Civil & Legal Rights Committee has some work to do, and met on Friday. The conversation about CRCF was helpful.

6. Strategic Planning Planning

Lisa. S. shared that Committee chairs & staff and she have been discussing embarking on a thorough strategic planning process to guide our work for the next 5 – 10 years. We’d like to identify questions, topics, and outcomes for VCW strategic planning process and create a committee to facilitate setting up a strategic planning process. The committee will not do the process alone and report back but would work on the nuts and bolts stuff, like scheduling and selecting a facilitator to lead this process.

Wendy, Sarah, Al, and Kim are interested in serving on this committee.

The group discussed some points that will be important to consider in the planning process, and that the committee will use in their planning.

7. Racial Equity Work

Cary invited an informal sharing out from RELC participants of their own perspective of their takeaways.

Commissioners and advisors discussed an article on white supremacy culture and had a conversation about ways that it is expressed in VCW operations, and moved into a related discussion about complex dynamics present in today’s meeting.

8. Closing

Cary closed the meeting by noting the number of things to follow up on, including thinking about ways that we can have these conversations in ways that don’t cause harm.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:32 p.m.