



State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
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Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 13th, 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting via video and teleconferencing

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Lisa Carlson,
Mary Daly, Kerin Durfee, Erica Hare, Kim Nolan, Sarah Mell,
Ashley Messier, Kiah Morris, Heidi Tringe, Lisa Ryan

Commissioners absent:

Kellie Campbell

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA Vermont
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids
Katarina Lisaius of the Office of Senator Sanders
Karen Trongsard-Scott of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Kaitie Armstrong of Vermont Women in Law Enforcement
Alison Lamagna & Rhoni Basden of Vermont Works for Women
Lisa Falcone, Mercy Connections
Meg Smith, Vermont Women's Fund

Guests:

Al Johnson-Kurts of Change The Story Vermont
Aidan Lane, VCW Intern
Logan Booker, Intern with Let's Grow Kids
Col Diane Roberts, Chief of Diversity & Inclusion, Vermont National Guard
Doris Sumner, former Vermont National Guard member

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:33 a.m.

Lisa welcomed our new Commissioners, Kiah and Kerin, and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Approve minutes of December 2020

MOTION made by Erica, seconded by Kim:

To approve the December 2020 minutes as submitted.

Hearing no nays, the motion is unanimously passed.

3. Staff Update

Moved to later in the meeting, as it is time to hear from our guest.

4. Vermont National Guard • Doris Sumner

Doris was an Equal Opportunity Officer, and instrumental in producing a gender report in the VT National Guard. Over 3000 citizens belong to VT National Guard, but the recruiting, retention, and promotion of women have remained stagnant for decades. Was in the army for 30 years, worked at Camp Johnson, and was the State Equal Employment and Diversity Manager. Representation of women in the guard has a direct correlation to the culture of the guard. We can't change the culture without changing the demographics, and we can't change the demographics without changing the culture. VCW has a plethora of strategies to advance rights and opportunities for women in Vermont.

We shouldn't have to continue to manage sexism. Disappointed with the closed circuit of accountability. We need accountability and guardrails to remain trustworthy. There is a history of letting women down, citing routine sex-based offenses, including sexual assault. Just 9% of cases end in conviction. Sexual harassment should be a criminal offense in the military code, and investigation should be independent. Nat'l guard reporting to the legislature is way underreported, progress is not being made. The gender report bill, H401 (2018), drafted by Jean O'Sullivan.

We aren't talking about why we have so many sex-based offenses, which is due to widespread everyday sexism rampant in the leadership in the guard. Women are leaving the force at 3x the rate of men. We need accountability for gender equality and we need a reporting mechanism for the sexist culture. 70% don't report because it's downplayed, seen as petty, and not taken seriously. Reporters face retaliation. National Guard caucus has been formed.

There is a need for an independent diversity office, who can set up an anonymous venue for people to report the cultural challenges. Subtle and pervasive sexism is rampant.

The bill has been redrafted so that the diversity officer to report to the caucus.

QUESTION - If H.401 doesn't pass, what can we do to encourage transparency?

Dialogue between legislators and adjunct general, and some legislators asking for more clarification, including one EO case that took 10 months to resolve, and then was unsubstantiated.

QUESTION – do you think they are digging deep enough? Did you feel comfortable being open and discussing things?

There is pressure to present the Guard in the best light. I couldn't really present my frustration to the legislators because of the pressure. There is not an open, transparent conversation about what's really happening.

I don't think we should be at 50% women in the next few years, but the growth rate should be improving. Even in recruiting and marketing, it's a very male-dominated organization. There is an

urgency here, sexual abuse impacts victims forever. We need the power structure to want to change the culture. There are so many different occupations that women can do in the military.

There are men who will not recruit their daughters, and that illustrates a big problem. The rate of current members recruiting family members has decreased overall, again illustrating the cultural problem.

QUESTION – I want to get back to what you feel you need. The Caucus doesn't have statutory authority, so reporting to the Caucus doesn't feel like the right approach. What would you like to see in the bill if it's going to be reintroduced? Who do you expect could be sponsors?

Without a true reflection of the challenges of working in a male-dominated, hierarchical organization, we can't change the culture. We need to have an avenue for members to share their experiences and have those heard without being watered down.

This needs a new bill sponsor, and for this to be brought back to life.

COMMENT – response is not prevention. Recognizing that one of our former Commissioners, Emilie, had co-sponsored the bill and might be an ally here. Adding folks who fit a demographic to change the culture before the culture hasn't shifted at all asks a lot of folks to experience harm in an effort to help. We need an increase in support services to support an increase in harm and also perhaps an increase in reporting, as it becomes safer to do so.

COMMENT – is it possible to reach out to Emma Mulvaney-Stanak about the work her predecessor did on this bill and ask her to get involved? I don't mind reaching out to her as my Rep and asking her to take this up.

QUESTION – Are there lessons to be gained from other countries that have higher rates of women's participation.

Canada, Israel have more women in the military, and although they have women in infantry, they still have widespread sexism in the military culture.

It feels painful that not enough people are mad about the sexism that's rampant. If the military can't get this right, how can America get it right? The military sets our values as a country. We need a bold change in how we hold the military accountable.

We need the people in power to champion the folks who report this and challenge the culture. We need the current leaders to buy into the importance of this change.

COMMENT – When we talk about culture change there is a lot of anxiety when a victim comes forward and says I'm not being treated the same as my co-workers. You need the cases to be reported and investigated, and in order to change the culture, we need to recognize it.

QUESTION - General Knight will be coming in March to our meeting, are there questions that we should ask him?

About the assessment taking so long to come back, when, where, why is it taking so long? What does it say? Asking about whether smaller, cross-gender conversations are still happening. Where is the support system for the folks at Camp Johnson? About the sponsorship program and ensuring newcomers are getting access to strong sponsors and supports.

QUESTION - Is there liability for bystanders to report and for leadership to address complaints in the military system? Is it enforced? Do they perceive that failing to take these things seriously could have negative repercussions for their careers just as folks who come forward do?

Yes, there is a policy, but there is a lot of peer pressure as well. Yes, there are some people who step up and report. It takes a lot of courage and fortitude to call things out and report them in the military.

COMMENT - "Also, the military is no different than most sectors when it comes to embedded sexism and racism - these are intentionally built into nearly every system that holds up our country."

COMMENT – "Agree... The whole system is built to uphold the power of the masculinity (and there are costs to those who gain from those powers) and the system creates incentives to maintain the status quo. We have to find ways to de-incentivize the culture. It will be better for all involved."

5. VCW Racial Equity Learning Community

A group of representatives of Change The Story, VCW, VWW, VCF, and the VT Network, are working together to share our own learning, organizational learning, and thinking about the ways that white supremacy is operating in the feminist movement in Vermont so that we can engage in better work that combats and does not perpetrate white supremacy. We've had two retreats, and in between these, we've been doing some work in small, cross-organizational groups with a representative from each organization. We're looking at what we're doing in our own organizations and the broader movement in Vermont, thinking about how white supremacy operates, how practices do or do not serve us, and imagine how we could do things differently.

Cary, Kim, Lisa S, and Hannah updated the commission on the work they've been doing in the Racial Equity Learning Community.

6. Advisory Council priorities

We had a great meeting with advisory council members in December. Cary shared a document that captures these priorities and also how the Commission can be effective in furthering the work. Can we take this into our Committees and look at how we can do this?

7. Committee work

The Commission broke out into Committees.

9. Announcements

Cary updated about the Change The Story evaluation process. Make sure you all have tomorrow's event on your calendar. Please do register if you are planning to attend. Thanks to those of you who have agreed to facilitate and serve as room monitors.

We're thrilled to welcome our new Commissioners. Emile & Marybeth have stepped down. The Governor still has two appointments to make. Please encourage people to apply. We don't have many Commissioners from the southernmost counties, and it would be great to have more representation from that area of the state.

Lilly - Reminder to share the national research study on Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on US Households, conducted by a research team of the University of Massachusetts Department of Economics and School of Public Policy. Link:
https://umassamherst.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cGC8QJ2tezs25PT.

Thurs evening Jan 28th at 6:30 p.m. Vermont Works for Women (VWW) and Vermont PBS present a Virtual Event: a sneak preview of the Independent Lens film 9to5: The Story of a Movement followed by a conversation with Cary and the co-founder of 9to5 Boston, hosted by VWW's Executive Director Rhoni Basden. <https://www.vtworksforwomen.org/support/attend-events>

Sarah "UVM's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on January 20th: Please save the date and join the UVM community for his keynote presentation, 'Slave Health Deficit: The Journey to Health Parity,' to be held on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 from 5:30-6:45 pm on Microsoft Teams.

Tickets are FREE and REQUIRED. eTickets are available now at go.uvm.edu/mlk2021. The URL to the live virtual celebration will be available closer to the event at uvm.edu/diversity/signature-events/mlk.

Keynote: Dr. Leon McDougle, MD, MPH 121st President of the National Medical Association"

Jen - Yesterday, Let's Grow Kids held briefings with our supporters to release our 2021 Legislative Agenda Whitepaper. You can find a copy of the whitepaper here: <https://letsgrowkids.org/resources-publications#LegislativeAgenda>

Meeting Adjourned at 12:23 p.m.