

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 13, 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell
Mary Daly, Charlotte Dennett, Erica Hare, Kim Nolan, Marcia
Merrill, Lisa Ryan, Kerry Secrest, Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Lisa Carlson, Emilie Kornheiser,
Marybeth Christie Redmond

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA-Vermont
Alison Lamagna and Rhoni Basden of Vermont Works for Women
Charlie Gliserman of the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids
Katherine Vose of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Burlington Chapter
Katarina Lisaius, Office of Bernie Sanders
Diane Derby, Office of Senator Sanders
Thea Wurzburg, Office of Congressman Welch

Staff: Anna Brouillette, Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert, Celia Gottlieb (intern)

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:36 a.m.

Lisa welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. Approval of April Meeting Minutes

Approval of April 2020 Minutes

MOTION made by Marcia Merrill seconded by Lisa Ryan:

To approve the April 2020 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED BY ROLL CALL VOTE. Nancy Brooks Abstained. Adopted as presented.

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

Health Care

Mary Daly – Committee moving forward with ideas on school and child nutrition.

Meredith Roberts – Recapped the current Vermont COVID numbers. Meeting every two weeks, school nurse, public health, etc, to discuss. The number one priority is the lack of protective equipment. The message we hear in the public is that there are plenty of supplies, but in hospitals, nurses are having to ration the PPE.

Lisa S. - Is there a role for the Commission on Women?

Heidi: We're in good shape, her firm represents nursing homes, Vermont is doing fine. The challenge is getting PPE to small businesses.

Meredith: Nurses aren't getting the supplies they need; operations are in scarcity mode. 18% of healthcare workers have tested positive. Nurses now are getting many fewer supplies than they are trained to avoid cross-contamination. One N95 mask per day versus one per patient. Needing to put them back on after breaks.

Child Care

Jen Horwitz - Gov says child care programs can open June 1 with specific health and safety guidelines. Capacity restrictions. COVID stabilization CCFAP payments have been based on enrollments, the state will begin paying on attendance. Let's Grow Kids has expressed concerns about that. How can we make sure that everyone is financially supported, that they have access to PPE as they reopen and that families have the supports they need?

Charlie Gliserman – Looking at food distribution systems, and what a childcare agenda looks like for funding?

Cary raised a few questions. With a reduction in full capacity for programs and loss of stabilization funds, how will childcare providers manage? What about families that have been paying all along, but don't get a childcare spot because of reduced capacity?

Jen - Very shortly, when we have more information and guidance from the State, there could be a role that the Commission could play in helping to elevate concerns/solutions.

Domestic and Sexual Violence

Programs are still serving Vermonters. Hotline calls were down initially, now they are back up and higher than pre-COVID. Court access is decreased with safety protocols and hearing only emergency cases. Trying to ramp up support to folks who have been using their services. Meal programs at schools can accept reports; many of those workers are mandatory reporters already.

Change The Story Update

Change The Story launched a social media campaign, This is How We Change, that looks at ways that the pandemic has highlighted inequities that have existed all along, as well as highlighting women who are really showing leadership.

Vermont Works for Women

VWW is focused on connecting folks to resources; providing supports for folks released from Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility; planning for the economic recovery phase and getting women back to work, and figuring out summer camps.

Office of Senator Sanders

The Senator is working to make the pieces of the CARES Act work better for the Vermonters. He has a team of caseworkers ready to help; if we're hearing from Vermonters struggling to access federal programs and benefits, please send them over.

Office of Senator Leahy

Senator Leahy is working on these federal benefits as well and looking at the 4th COVID response spending bill. They are working on clarifying how Vermont can spend the federal dollars and is also working on increasing federal support for domestic violence response programs.

The Women's Economic Opportunity Conference planning is on hold. WEOC on hold; a decision will be made after July 1.

Office of Congressman Welch

The U.S. House just put out its 4th spending bill, which includes \$100 million for VAWA, though this is fluid as it moves to the Senate.

4. VCW research into COVID-19 impacts on Vermonters

Cary shared Anna's document of data she has been collecting in response to our questions. Considering putting this information up. Anna discussed the process, obstacles, and proposed adding a few questions to this document, including about food insecurity.

Lisa S. – When we're confident, this is a place where we can highlight through social media with good graphics. Reach out to media to make sure that these issues are being covered.

5. VCW COVID-19 response and recovery recommendations

We've been inspired by reports published by the Massachusetts and Hawaii Commissions of the Status of Women.

VCW's draft outline report, A GENDER SPOTLIGHT ON VERMONT'S RECOVERY FROM COVID-19: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY

Considering VCW holding a public hearing virtually and conducting a survey that could give us some more information people.

Discussion points included:

Mass had a lot of information that was true for everyone, it would be helpful to home in on how the impacts affect women specifically.

These issues tie back to pre-COVID, and we should continue to highlight that. When this is over, those issues and inequities will still exist. How do we build in more resiliency?

Essential workers largely care-giving, underpaid, and underappreciated roles. This is an opportunity to think about how we move forward in a way that doesn't perpetuate inequities.

A survey is likely to be more efficient and effective than a public hearing, which many would not be able to attend because of shift work, child care, etc.

Structural inequities are things we're seeing in stark relief because of COVID, and these have a significant impact on the economy and the recovery.

Add something about how we budget our money going forward, and it's time to reframe how we look at where we put our money. That needs to recognize the likelihood of future pandemics and disasters.

Findings section – how deep to go, how much to highlight; this is an opportunity to be really intersectional and paint a holistic picture.

Constantly having this conversation about how much information is too much information – there is so much information out there. How can we convey the most important points as succinctly as possible?

Lean on folks we worked with on the LP for some of this information, as well as advisory organizations. League of Cities and Towns.

Think about how we can improve situations for folks in the long-run, and not just focus on improving the situation right now.

6. Vermont State Colleges System

A few weeks ago, the VSCS chancellor proposed closing the Vermont Tech Randolph Campus and the Lyndon University campuses in the northeast kingdom. That proposal was withdrawn, and now VSCS is working with the legislature to come up with a new vision of what the VSCS will look like. Vermont Tech is focused on access and equity in their conversations about how to move forward. Kellie discussed an [article about Amarillo College's "No Excuses" program](#), shared with the Education & Human Development Committee by Charlie.

Cary's [VTDigger piece](#) about this has gotten a lot of positive feedback.

Katarina – covering education for Senator Sanders – he is deeply concerned about this, for all the reasons outlined by Cary. They've heard from 100's of people about this proposal and ideas for how they could change.

Additional discussion points included:

Are we talking about high-speed internet as a tool to save the VSC?

How do we keep the costs down and remain competitive while providing reasonable salaries? Nursing faculty typically get paid 30% or more less than what they would get paid at a hospital.

There is a lot of real estate owned by the VSC – and a lot of tuition goes to cover that expense. How does that get rolled into the conversation?

Randolph is a more expensive campus to maintain than Williston, largely because of its size, residential buildings.

7. Staff Updates

VCW Budget

The state is still working on the FY21 budget, which has not yet been passed and is facing FY21 revenue shortfalls. Proposing a 'Skinny Start' budget for the first quarter, July – September, and then coming back and passing a spending bill for the rest of the year. The instructions that we received, funding at 23% of our total FY20 budget for the first quarter. There is no way for us to meet this without impacting staff. Cary is considering all options, including eliminating our state office and moving to 100% remote work, furloughing staff, moving to part-time, etc. Cary invites ideas to creatively solve this problem.

Lilly sent an email about how to help get the word out about the virtual symposium The Centennial of Women's Suffrage: One Event, Many Perspectives, which debuts online this Saturday at 2 and will be available on-demand as 4 separate videos after. This event is a partnership effort of Ethan Allen Homestead Museum, League of Women Voters of Vermont, the Commission. Help spread the word!

Lisa R. Civil and legal rights committee will gather – watch for an email invite.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:43 p.m.