Commission Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2008

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill, Chair; Sharon Baade, Eileen Boland, Cary Brown, Carol Buchdahl, Retta Dunlap, Ruth Finn, Linda Fogg, Cathy Frey, Anne McClaughry, Marion Milne, and Vicky Young.

Commissioners Absent: Laine Akiyama, Gretchen Bailey, Mary Claire Carroll, and Karen Henry.

Advisory Council Members Present: Joanna Cole representing Vermont League of Women Voters, Lindy Hatcher representing Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women, Linda Ingold representing the Vermont Women’s Business Center, Margaret Luce representing Vermont State Nurses’ Association, Tracy Phillips representing the Office of Women’s Health at the Department of Health, Barbara Saunders representing the Child Care Fund of Vermont, and Carol Story representing the Girl Scout Council of Vermont.

Guests: Carmel Quinn from the Girl Scout Council of Vermont along with attendees of the Girl Scout United Nations Program, and Lu Ann Beninati from the Child Care Advisory Board.

Presiding: Marcia Merrill          Recording: Janet Bullard

Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Marcia Merrill.

Welcome/Introductions/Announcements/Minutes

Marcia welcomed everyone. She stated that she thoroughly enjoyed the Girl Scout Breakfast of Champions this morning and thanked everyone who attended. Marcia also congratulated our own Judith Irving on receipt of a Girl Scout Champion award. Carol announced that we are close to our fundraising goal for our sponsorship of the Girls Rock the Capital Program. Marion announced that she is a member of the Vermont Civil Rights Committee. Wendy mentioned that she met with our newest commissioner Laine Akiyama last week and explained that Laine could not make this meeting due to a prior commitment.

Minutes

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2008 Commission Meeting as amended. Seconded by Marion Milne. Amended as follows: Page 3, 3rd paragraph change Joanne to Joanna and 5th paragraph, second sentence – delete “Because … certification” and add, “Completion of home study enrollment for home schooling,” takes… Voted unanimously.
Vermont Women’s Business Center

Linda Ingold, Director of the Vermont Women’s Business Center (VWBC) informed everyone that the VWBC provides women with the training, assistance, and support needed to start and expand successful businesses, thus promoting economic independence and healthy communities.

The VWBC offers comprehensive and statewide business development services including tailoring programs to address the needs and experiences of women, provides a safe space enhancing the opportunity to build relationships and support networks, provides relevant business training to help women gain valuable skills, and also provides networking and support services to build a bridge to business culture.

Linda announced that the VWBC is partially funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration and is currently seeking state funding for long-term stability of the center (H.714). She continued by asking the Commission for their support and guidance in seeking the state funding.

Ruth reported that the Commission’s Economic Committee recommends that the full Commission support H.714 calling for state funding for the Vermont Women’s Business Center. Motion seconded by Carol Buchdahl. Discussion followed. Sharon Baade then called the question. Vote to call the question passed unanimously. Vote on original motion, yes – 9, no – 3, motion passed.

Childcare Advisory Board: Increasing the Child Care Subsidy

Lu Ann Beninati, a member of the Child Care Advisory Board, explained that the Child Care Advisory Board offers support to the State’s Child Care Development Division and reports to the Legislature about the status of childcare in Vermont. Lu Ann informed everyone that she has been a childcare provider for over thirty years and currently operates a center with ten employees. She is also an early care educator.

Lu Ann reported that there are too many families that are not eligible for a childcare subsidy because Vermont continues to use the outdated 1999 federal poverty guidelines. For example, in 1999 a two-parent family with two children and an annual income of $37,380 was eligible for a childcare subsidy. In 1999, $37,380 was approximately 225% of the federal poverty level. In 2007, a similar family at 225% of the updated federal poverty level has an income of $46,463. Today such a family would not be eligible for a childcare subsidy because its income exceeds $37,380. Today, this same family, earning $37,380 or 181% of the 2007 federal poverty guideline is not eligible for any childcare subsidy reimbursement, but is eligible financially for both Dr. Dynasaur and the Women, Infants and Children program. Each year Vermont does not update its childcare subsidy
eligibility criteria means more families are denied access to the program designed to serve them.

Lu Ann also noted that the gap is growing between the state subsidy rates and the childcare market rates. For the children of working parents to be in a safe learning place, lower income families and child care providers must make up the difference or gap between the state subsidy reimbursement rate and the market rate. Parents are financially responsible for this difference, generally termed a copay. The state of Vermont is losing ground. In many areas the state subsidy child care reimbursement rates for specific types of child care are lower than the rates charged by more than half of the providers in that region, that is, below the 50th percentile. The federal standard is a state subsidy reimbursement rate set at the 75th percentile.

Motion made by Cary Brown to support increasing the childcare subsidy rate. Seconded by Ruth Finn. Vote: yes - 9 no – 3. Motion passed.

Report from the 52nd UN Commission on the Status of Women – Girl Scout panel

Carmel Quinn, the coordinator of girls programs, gave the following opening statement. In November 2007, the Girl Scout Council of Vermont was asked to participate in the United Nations 52nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW is held every year and brings together representatives from all Member States of the UN as well as over 4,000 NGO members. The Commission provides a distinct place in the UN agenda that is entirely devoted to examining the state of progress for women. Women still compromise the majority of the world’s absolute poor and those without access to education. The 52nd Commission’s theme was Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Vermont was asked to participate based on the powerful impact of GSCV’s nationally recognized organizational advocacy efforts, including our Girls Rock the Capitol Legislative Internship Program. We were asked to select six interns who demonstrated the courage, confidence and character to stand tall in such a humbling setting. We chose well.

GSCV worked with GSUSA and the World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) focusing on the review theme ‘Women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building’. This review theme looked at United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, unanimously ratified in October 2000. Resolution 1325 marks the first time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women, recognized the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make to conflict
prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace building, and stressed the importance of their equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.

The girls attended sessions on human trafficking; women, girls and HIV and AIDS prevention; financing for gender equality; political accountability to women; the effects of war on women and children; and actively participated in the US caucus and daily NGO briefings. The girls ensured that the voice of girls and young women was heard at the UN. The GSCV teens, along with three teens from New Jersey took the lead at the WAGGGS hosted side-event: *girls worldwide say “we have the right to live in peace”*, sharing WAGGGS peace projects from throughout the world. The girls met women from Lebanon, Rwanda, Burundi, Iran, France, Zimbabwe, London, Mozambique, Germany, Japan, Ireland ..........just to name a few. The girls worked, and *rocked*, around the clock!

Each participate then talked about their unique experiences. In closing the girls shared a statement developed by the CSW Working Group on Girls and shared with the NGOs and General Assembly which is as follows:

**Girls Statement:**

My name is ___________________Girl Scouts of the USA. I am a member of the Girl Scout Council of Vermont and participate in the Girls Rock the Capital Legislative Internship Program. I am here on behalf of the girls at CSW.

We, the girls participating in the Fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, have the following statements for our international leaders in regards to financing gender equality. As the next generation of women, we urge you to consider our ideas on improving gender equality when creating budgets for our future:

- **Education at the primary and secondary level should be mandatory and guaranteed for all girls.** We want the government and our families to invest in our futures and provide us with all of the opportunities afforded to boys in the education system. We want female teachers, access to safe transportation, sanitary conditions, and an increase in the number of affordable boarding schools, as well as female only and mixed gender schools. We want to know our rights as girls and children. We want to know how to protect ourselves and also who will protect us. We want a voice within our schools and we want access to technology. We want to be productive members of society, and need knowledge and confidence to do so.

- **We want all girls, children and women to receive full healthcare.** All pregnant women need pre-natal care, nutritional foods and help keeping their babies and children healthy. Girls do not always receive adequate nutrition and we want to be healthy and strong.
• Girls deserve to understand their bodies, their reproductive abilities and how to safely prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. We want sex education and information about our bodies, so that we can better understand our development into women. We want to understand our contraceptive options and be assured access to those options. We want protection from sexual abuse, harassment and assault.

• Our safety from abuse is crucial in our development and growth as girls. We want to be protected, and know that we are safe. We want specific “Safety Zones” that are accessible to us under all circumstances, where we can go to escape abuse and mistreatment. We want to be trained and informed on how to protect ourselves, and have a voice in how we are protected by others. When we have not been protected, we want our experiences to be heard.

• We want all members of society to be educated about our rights as girls and how to treat us equally to boys. Nothing will change until adults understand that they are the people that we learn from and we need their ideas about girls and boys to change. Boys also need to be taught to treat girls equally. We want all research and data within our country to be analyzed based on gender AND age to see where women and girls are underrepresented.

• Governments have an obligation to protect all girls with their laws and actions. We want our countries to create anti-discrimination laws that clearly state that girls and boys should be treated equally. We want law enforcers to make sure that people are obeying the laws and that they are punished if they are treating girls badly. We want a law that prevents girls from marrying anyone before they are 18 years old.

• Without jobs our futures will be uncertain and our educations wasted. We want to know that upon completion of our schooling that there will be jobs waiting for us. We want professional growth in our jobs and ask our governments to provide scholarships and incentives in higher education and job skills training. We want to be paid and hired on an equal basis with men in the same profession. THANK YOU.

Everyone then moved to the State House for the release of the Girl Scout Survey

Girl Scout Survey Release – House Chambers

In collaboration, the Girl Scout Council of Vermont and the Vermont Commission on Women conducted this research study of over 100 teen girls in grades 6 through 12 to address their concerns around body image, health, and wellness. Teen girls answered questions about their personal perspectives on diet, nutrition, and exercise; and, concerns around alcohol, drugs, sex, and fitting-in. Included were open-ended questions, such as, “How do you define ‘normal’ healthy?” and “What would you like to tell a Vermont Senator or Representative about being a student in your school or town that they might not know?” Participants included Vermont girls in schools across the state. Survey results were evaluated as a whole, by regions of Vermont, and in like-grade groups (6th through 12th).
Girls ranging in age from 11 – 18 from over 51 Vermont schools and all geographic regions of Vermont completed the survey.

What did teen girls say?
For most girls, being healthy has more to do with appearing “normal” in relation to other girls their own age and feeling accepted by their peers. Definitions of good diet and exercise habits vary in relation to their perceptions and are often markedly different than what would be considered healthy by those in the medical fields.

Girls often described their health and physical activity as “normal in relation to other girls my age” a concept clearly related to appearance and acceptance. In general, physical appearance and how they compare to others in their peer group are more important than what they eat or how much they exercise.

Fifty-five percent of Vermont girls surveyed indicated that their lifestyle was “healthy enough for my age and I’m happy with that.” Although over two-thirds of those surveyed indicated, “personal health and fitness is very important to me,” many of those surveyed are skipping breakfast everyday with an additional 18% skipping this important meal more than once a week. Six percent of girls surveyed indicate that they binge and purge to lose weight more than once a month.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.