

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 11, 2017 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
32 College St, Montpelier VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett (by phone), Ruth Finn, Emilie Kornheiser, Danielle Martel, Melinda Moulton, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Kerry Secrest, Lisa Senecal

Commissioners absent:

Laine Dunham, Nancy LaVarnway, Susie Hudson, Colin Ryan

Advisors present:

Ashley Michelle Fowler of Mercy Connections, Kevin Veller of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office, Diane Derby of U.S. Senator Leahy's Office, Kelly Ault of Vermont Early Childhood Alliance

Guests: Deb Brighton, consultant with VT Joint Fiscal Office; Edisa Muller; Denise Schultz, Director of Outreach and Operations, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy and Chair, Steering Committee, New England Women's Policy Initiative

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Lane

Meeting called to order at 9:32 a.m.

Welcome/Introductions

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

Marcia gave Marybeth Redmond and Gretchen Bailey kudos for attending this evening's International Day of the Girl event with Muslim Girls Making Change at South Burlington High School.

Diane Derby and Kevin Veller gave brief updates about work at the federal level.

Approval of September 2017 Minutes

MOTION made by Melinda, seconded by Carol:

To approve the September 2017 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.

Staff Updates

Cary discussed several policy areas staff have been working on: the minimum age of marriage and child marriage, paid family leave and the upcoming film screenings of ZERO weeks happening around the state, increasing the minimum wage, and a potential equal pay bill including a provision prohibiting employers from asking a job applicant's salary history.

Cary will be presenting about Change the Story at the Community College of Vermont in Brattleboro tomorrow and at the School for International Training (SIT) next week on October 20 at 4:00 p.m. The event at SIT is open to the public.

Cary is a member of the new Spousal Support & Maintenance Taskforce which will be holding a public hearing on November 6th, location TBD. Cary gave a brief overview of the origins of the task force. Lilly asked Commissioners to send out VCW's survey and touch base with people they know who may have experience with spousal maintenance and to put our request on their local Front Porch Forum. It was suggested that we contact the authors of *Divorce in the Green Mountains*, as they may have some stories from people.

Hannah provided a brief update on the status of the budget.

Lilly gave an update about her project creating a video/public service announcement about the new Pregnancy Accommodations law with in partnership with the Department of Labor and the Civil Rights Unit of the Vermont Office of the Attorney General. They hope the video is completed before January 1st. It was suggested that Lilly might connect with Mamava and with Equal Pay Compact signers in regard to the video project.

Minimum Wage Discussion

Deb Brighton is a consultant from the VT Joint Fiscal Office, and presented about the benefits cliff and the minimum wage.

Deb explained that there are currently three proposals about raising the minimum wage:

\$12.50 by 2021
\$13.25 by 2022
\$15.00 by 2022

Deb discussed the demographics of minimum wage earners in Vermont:

- There are more women earning minimum wage compared to men.
- Two-thirds of minimum wage workers work full-time, but more women work part-time than men.
- 58% of minimum wage workers are single, 42% are head of household (either have children or a spouse or both)
- 59% of minimum wage workers are over age 30, but male minimum wage workers tend to be younger. 32% of men earning minimum wage are over 40, compared to 48% of women earning minimum wage.
- Of minimum wage workers, women tend to have more education; 33% of women earning minimum wage have a college degree or more compared to 23% of men earning minimum wage.

Looking at raising the minimum wage and the benefits cliff is an opportunity to address a problem we've had for a long time.

There is generally no benefits cliff for single workers in our state, or for couples without children. While increased earnings might lead to reduced benefits for these folks, an increase in pay still translates to more net resources available. Where we see a benefits slope or cliff is in families that need childcare.

The slope in Vermont is seen when income is between 100% and 300% of the federal poverty line (FPL). Workers earning just under 300% of the FPL have the same net resources available as when they only earned 100% of the FPL because of the reduced benefits available, and there is a resource valley in between.

We can change the slope with the child care subsidy by moving the schedule so that reductions to the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) don't begin until a family earns 129%. Currently, CCFAP benefits begin declining as soon as a family's income is above 100% of the FPL. Making this adjustment to the program would bring more people into the program, and start to fill the benefits valley. Shifting funds saved by raising the minimum wage in increased payroll tax, reduced VT Earned Income Tax Credit, reduced dependence on Medicaid, etc. into CCFAP would pay for the program change. In this analysis, Deb estimated both new people coming into the CCFAP program and the increase in the cost of childcare associated with increasing the minimum wage. Increased utilization rates could push the cost higher, on the other hand, our child care supply constraint would keep utilization in check.

There was a discussion about the how an increase in minimum wage might impact people on social security or disability, as well as questions about how many additional people would consider entering the workforce if the minimum wage was raised and made paying for childcare easier.

The Commission discussed paperwork requirements associated with benefits, people not applying for benefits because of small subsidies and barriers like needing paperwork from employers and shame and stigma associated with asking for it.

There is a [report on Joint Fiscal Office's website](#) by Tom Kavet of Kavet, Rockler & Associate that projects long-term slowed economic growth, resulting in 3000 fewer jobs created compared to if we didn't raise the wage. Commissioners mentioned that increasing the minimum wage could attract young people to the state, along with other initiatives like paid sick days and paid family leave. Commissioners also suggested surveying Equal Pay Compact signers about their thoughts on increasing the minimum wage.

Deb mentioned that some states have different minimum wage schedules for different size employers and some phase in small businesses after large businesses.

VCW Information-Gathering Project

Melinda informed the Commission that the Economic Equity & Security Committee set a standing meeting on the first Thursday of every month at 8:00 a.m.

Her committee is leading an initiative for the Commission to conduct a listening tour, holding public hearings around the state in 2018. Change The Story (CTS) has been a great success for us and has elevated our organizations and the conversation around women in the state. The reports are the beginning, they paint the statistical story, but our goal is to make changes that help lift women out of poverty – the middle piece is humanity; what is going on in women's lives in Vermont that's preventing them from being successful? By holding these hearings, we expect to have a clear picture of what's happening around the state by the end of 2018, and then we can look at policy changes that will help.

One big piece of this project is to create a survey to get out to women across the state about their experiences, which we need to develop together.

Cary further explained plans to build a Survey Monkey form or another tool to create an easy, quick survey to solicit experiences from people all across the state. What information do we want to get? She asked Commissioners to brainstorm survey questions. Ideas generated included:

- “What’s in the way of you and economic independence?” – This question could be a list to prioritize.
- “What would improve your economic situation?”
- The survey should also be distributed via paper to community organizations that can help solicit responses like libraries, child care center, community action agencies, churches, etc.
- Consider access around language to ensure we hear from New Americans.
- Questions should include an “Other” response and provide some blank space to write.
- Consider consulting with some survey development professionals to ensure we’re making good use of time and resources.
- Make sure we hear from queer women, trans folks, women of color, women with disabilities, etc. We should ask for this demographic information.
- Consult with Blueprint for Health, as they gather a lot of information regarding everyone under 21, about access to housing, transportation, and food. They might be helpful in formulating questions.
- Include some background information from Change The Story.
- “What is working/helping?”
- Run the survey through reading-level analysis.
- Town meetings
- Men and workplace flexibility, aren’t comfortable to ask for time off.
- Ask about Gender, Income Level, Age, Cohabiting, Children
- Geographic location
- Consider two surveys: a provider survey and an individual survey.

An ad hoc committee was formed to further discuss this and will consist of Marybeth, Eileen, Carol, Melinda, and Emilie.

New England Women’s Policy Initiative

Denise Shultz gave some background information about the New England Women’s Policy Initiative. They held their first biennial conference 2014, and the second in 2016. She handed out their Call to Action: A Policy Framework for Women’s Economic Security document for review. She also mentioned that NEWPI recently awarded VCW a seed grant to do salary negotiation workshops.

Denise requested feedback about how can they be more inclusive of women in Vermont and increase participation. Commissioners mentioned:

- It’s pricey to travel to Boston, stay overnight, pay for parking and meals.
- A two-day conference might work better.
- Having Vermonters on panels is a draw.

- Having the conference in different, non-Boston locations. Perhaps they could be co-hosted by the local state commission.
- Offer concrete skill building, facilitated networking opportunities that connect people with out-of-state peers in their interest/focus areas.
- Offer content that supports making connections and exchanging information.
- We very rarely travel out of state, so why don't we piggyback a regional commission meeting onto the Conference the day before or after?
- Make the conference engaging and interactive. There are different modalities to bring people together, like bringing problems or case studies to a group, creating space for information sharing, troubleshooting, working together and engaging each other.
- Consider Women's workplace sexual harassment.

Announcements

The next Women's Leadership Circle will be held in the Waterbury-Stowe area, they are recruiting now; the application deadline is Nov. 24th, the circle will launch in January.

VICE news recently did a piece about online sex. There are viewers in Vermont having online sex with children ages 5 -12 from the Philippines. Maybe we should consider looking into this in the future.

Mercy Connections offers a 15-week business course and they are looking for two instructors; one with experience in micro-finance and one with experience in marketing. Keep an eye out for the posting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:27 p.m.