

Talbert, Lilly

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Subject: Press Release from VT Commission on Women: Paid Sick Days panel discussion

For Immediate Release

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Vermont Commission on Women (VCW), in partnership with the University of Vermont Women's and Gender Studies program, gathered a diverse group of professionals for a panel discussion concerning paid sick days for Vermont workers. The panel discussion was held on Monday morning, April 22nd in the Old Mill building on the University of Vermont's campus green.

A broad conversation took place about Vermont's current labor practices around paid time off policies, the dynamics of Vermont's employers and labor force, and the issue of paid sick and safe days from a policy perspective.

Kristin Carlson of WCAX TV facilitated the discussion. Welcome was provided by Cary Brown the Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women. An introduction to the topic was provided by UVM's Dr. Felicia Kornbluh, the Director of the Women's and Gender Studies program and a current VCW Commissioner. Panelists included: Representative Johannah Donovan of Burlington, Chair of the Vermont House Committee on Education; Dr. Elaine McCrate Associate Professor of Economics and Women's and Gender Studies at UVM, Ellen Bravo Executive Director of the national Family Values at Work Coalition, Dan Barlow of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Lindsay DesLauriers of the Vermont Paid Sick Days Coalition.

Several themes emerged from the at times highly personal discussion, including implications for public health, the disproportionate impact of a lack of paid sick leave on children and mothers, and the costs and benefits to employers of providing paid time off. Panelists pointed out that when people aren't able to afford to take time off work to tend to health needs, we see lower rates of preventative care, more widespread infections in outbreaks of disease (such as during the H1N1 pandemic, when an estimated 5 million additional people were infected due to sick people continuing to go to work), and greater use of emergency rooms because they are open during non-business hours. With 70% of children missing school due to illness at some point during the school year, and with mothers more likely to be caregivers for children, lack of paid time off can mean that children go to school when sick, and that women are losing income from lost work time when they stay home with their children. The costs to employers of providing paid time off, both in additional payroll expenses and administrative work, were cited in the conversation, as were benefits to employers who can expect lower rates of turnover and lower rates of employee absenteeism from flu infection. Audience members shared their own stories and asked questions, including making the point that children's voices often go unheard in these conversations.

The Vermont Commission has been involved in this issue since its inception in 1964. Meeting minutes of the very first VCW meetings read: "discussions included the creation of a state entity to address wage inequities and employment rights." The Commission continues to have vigorous

discussions and include diverse points of view. It is their mission to reduce decimation and encourage opportunities for Vermont women.

VCW is an independent state government commission charged with reducing discrimination and encouraging opportunities for women and girls. Sixteen volunteer commissioners and representatives from organizations concerned with women's issues guide the commission's public education, coalition building, and advocacy efforts. VCW uses the information gathered at events like this to inform our work on behalf of women and families in Vermont.

The Commission is grateful to our host for this event, the [UVM Women's and Gender Studies Program](#). Current VCW Commissioner Felicia Kornbluh is also both Associate Professor of History and Director of this program, focusing on concepts such as sex, gender, and sexuality; identities such as female, male, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer; the intersections of these identities with race, class, (dis)ability and other kinds of differences among people; and academic subjects including women's history, the sociology of the family, race and gender in urban space, queer theory, sex and politics, and biological approaches to sex and gender. The program is scholarly and interdisciplinary, offering a diverse and inclusive curriculum, rigorous classes and asking real-world questions.