

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 13, 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, Laine Dunham, Ruth Finn, Emilie Kornheiser, Nancy LaVarnway, Danielle Martel, Melinda Moulton, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Colin Ryan, Kerry Secrest (phone), Lisa Senecal

Commissioners Absent: Susie Hudson

Advisors Present: Sara Chesbrough (Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Coordinator, Division of Maternal and Child Health, Vermont Department of Health) and Christine Ryan Executive Director and Government Affairs for American Nurses Association – Vermont

Guests: Edisa Muller

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Lilly Talbert

1. Call to order

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

2. Approval of June 2017 minutes

MOTION made by Carol and seconded by Eileen to approve meeting minutes for June 2017 meeting meetings as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED

3. Welcome new commissioners

Marcia asked for all present to introduce themselves, providing brief professional background and addressing the question of where their passion for women's issues came from.

4. Staff updates

Cary addressed developments over the summer, including Change The Story work, coalition activity on minimum wage and paid family and medical leave, examining child marriage in public policy, and highlighted Senator Leahy's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, taking place on September 16, 2017 at Vermont Technical College in Randolph Center.

Lilly detailed activity of two summer interns who completed updates for many VCW materials and bolstering our social media channels. She highlighted Vermont Women's Fund's annual event and Vermont Works for Women's Women Can Do conference.

5. Minimum wage discussion

Last year VCW voted to join the Raise the Wage Coalition. To represent VCW on the coalition, what aspects should we bring up? Cary facilitated a quick topic review in order to prepare for fuller October

meeting discussion after economist Deb Brighton's presentation. She asked what the group's questions, issues and concerns were and if further information was needed.

Some of the points raised include:

- How many women would be affected by the benefits cliff? would like to hear from actual women that are currently experiencing this
- important for VCW to continue alignment with minimum wage and benefits cliff
- bills have different timelines. What is in best interest and what timeframe works best?
- what data has been compiled? We'd like to hear from women currently impacted by loss of benefits because of increased wages
- holistically look at improving women's conditions, and then move forward in a united way. Important that our efforts do not to oppose a minimum wage increase as a member of coalition
- which benefits can we affect? There is great uncertainty around federal cuts
- Employers may have policies preventing employees from reducing hours to preserve benefits
- engage small business and chambers of commerce – engage in dialogue, bring in that perspective, conversations and negotiations between employers and workers
- an increase in min. wage isn't enough. Consider Guaranteed Annual Income
- consider possible economic effects - UW study could be a resource
- also define benefits: employee wellness programs may serve as substitute – shifting responsibility to individual
- minimum wage increase's impact on Reach Up work requirement. Does it lower work requirements?
- long term overall econ impact - does an increase help people get off public assistance, or is this going to result in more money, longer

6. VCW information-gathering project

The commissioners discussed plans for a year-long information-gathering project in which commissioners learn about challenges, resources, and gaps faced by women in their communities. The Economic Equity and Security committee is taking on planning a series of public hearings in different parts of the state that some commissioners will take point on. More planning will be done at the October meeting.

7. Spousal Support & Maintenance Task Force

Cary is a member of this task force created by the legislature in 2017 for the purpose of reviewing and making legislative recommendations to Vermont's laws concerning spousal support and maintenance. She asked to hear from the commissioners what the issues are that they think are important, what questions they would like addressed, and what they would like her to bring to the task force.

Some of the points raised in the discussion include:

- It's critical to balance representation on the task force. Most who provided testimony were men
- child support guidelines were helpful; different judges deal with it differently – not helpful.
- Only wealthy people have lawyers in divorces – so guidelines are even more important
- One commissioner had a conversation with a mediator; would love state numbers, not just national
- women currently in process of divorce unwilling to talk about it

- contributions made to the marriage isn't a factor currently considered, but it should be added
- often there is an element of shame when women receive alimony, it's a continued connection with ex-spouse, reminder that you're still dependent and not self-sustaining
- many cases where a woman may get additional property in the settlement, in lieu of alimony

9. Announcements

No announcements

10. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:34 p.m.