

**Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes**

October 14, 2015

Pavilion Office Building, 4th floor conference room, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT

Commissioners Present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Laine Dunham, Ruth Finn, Jennie Gartner*, Susie Hudson, Nancy LaVarnway, Danielle Martel, Melinda Moulton*, Colin Ryan, Kerry Secrest

*via phone

Commissioners Absent:

Lynn Batchelor, Charlotte Dennett

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Lilly Talbert

Guest: Alexandra Philippone

Advisors: Katarina Lisaius and Liz Amler (intern), representing U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, Julie Scribner representing Vermont Women in Law Enforcement, Marybeth Redmond representing Vermont Works for Women, Auburn Watersong representing the VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Guests: Trine Bech – Executive Director at Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc.; Amy Brady – Foster Parent and Development Coordinator at Voices for Vermont’s Children; Dave Kennedy – Guardian Ad Litem Program Manager for the Court Administrators Office

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

Welcome/Introductions: Marcia welcomed everyone and asked those present to introduce themselves.

Approval of September 2015 minutes

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Nancy E. Lavarnway

MOTION APPROVED w/BGS spelled out to Department of Buildings and General Services

Child Protection

Discussion: Trine Bech – Founding Director at [Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc.](#); Amy Brady – Foster Parent and Development Coordinator at [Voices for Vermont’s Children](#); Dave Kennedy – Guardian Ad Litem Program Manager for the Court Administrators Office

Trine Bech – Started [Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc.](#) 9 years ago with others who felt the child protection system didn’t speak for children. The Center acts as proxy and is a preventive tool to shore up vulnerable families so that children can live safely at home. The Center has focused on serving pregnant parents and those involved in opiate addiction. Vermont has one of the highest rates of termination of parental rights (TPR) for very young children. She believes we’ve set up a system that doesn’t work for families: Reach Up can be extended by 180 days via rules; this provision isn’t employed enough. Women are at much higher risk of relapse. She

believes that the money spent on foster care would be better spent providing supports, in a trauma informed, sensitive and respectful way, and that TPR should be last resort.

Amy Brady – Foster Parent and Development Coordinator at Voices for Vermont’s Children; single mom with a 5 year old. Once she was licensed as a foster parent, she began to have many calls to take in foster children, and currently fosters 2 young children for the last 7 months. Substance abuse is huge factor in landing kids in foster care, but not the only one – she believes we should not lose sight of other factors like mental health treatment access, poverty and other big societal problems. Self-advocacy is often missing in families connected to DCF. Needs extend beyond current service availability, and foster parents are desperately needed. She believes that it is asking a lot of parents to find stability, health care, etc. in a short period of time, and very often it’s the community of people surrounding the parents that is risky. She is impressed with DCF, and would like to see more resources for all programs, including visitation staff, and supports that extended beyond DCF, like Reach Up. Voices will be working towards establishing an Office of Child Advocate, which would have oversight of all services, be a place to call for information or concerns, data collection, make recommendations.

Dave Kennedy – Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Program Manager for the Court Administrator’s Office. He works closely with DCF and has faith in the system. In his experience, at the end of process there is frequently a good outcome. He emphasized that the Child Protection system is a RESPONSE, not a solution. The GAL central office supports county programs, part-time coordinators, with the most well-funded working 12 hours per week in Chittenden County. Currently there are 270 GALs. Courts appoint GAL and attorney for children, and appoint attorney for parents. GALs are to get as much info about children as possible. Meet with all, health care providers, school staff/faculty; obtain a complete picture of child, for evidence-based determination of needs of child. Work with child’s attorney, so that in all proceedings, child’s best interests are represented. GALs get background check, 32 hours of training, mentoring process, once they are ready – supervised heavily during first case. Then staff are pulled in just for problems. Need more GALs – welcome specialists in certain populations.

Outcome: What is the role of the VCW in this issue of child protection/parental rights? Next steps: hear from DCF. If there is a bill, weigh in. Melinda will seek feedback from the poverty council she serves on with Cary. Commissioners would like more education before weighing in. Suggesting a speaker with boots on ground like a DCF intake manager.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau Grant

The Vermont Commission on Women will receive a \$173,794 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau to study the feasibility of developing a statewide paid family and medical leave program. Such a program would ensure all Vermont workers have access to paid time off to care for themselves, a new child, or a seriously ill family member, the Department of Labor announced today. These funds are to be used for planning purposes, including research and analysis, examining program design and eligibility guidelines. In addition to Vermont, the grants—totaling \$1.55 million—were awarded to five other states: California, New Hampshire, Tennessee,

Rhode Island and Washington; and to two municipalities: New York City and Montgomery County in Maryland.

Discussion: Cary spoke about contracting out this project as essentially a series of small research projects and will keep us posted on progress.

TDCI Forums

VCW partnered with Main Street Alliance of Vermont to host five morning forums across the state this fall exploring the possibility of developing and implementing a state-run Temporary Disability and Caregiver Insurance (TDCI) Program in our state as a funding mechanism for leave.

Discussion: Melinda spoke about Burlington forum where discussion about employee-funded program was lively. Laine reported that at the Manchester forum there were many questions about the math and employee-funded program mechanics. HR people were concerned this would be taken advantage of. Danielle reported on the St. Albans forum. Very well attended. She sat next to a Calif. Worker's comp attorney. CA has a law and the attorney cited care in crafting bill language, 1 week waiting period before 12 weeks start - @ 66% - job guaranteed for 6 weeks. Include care for elderly parents and in-laws.

Outcome: Putting together materials that answer many questions.

Vermont Women's Economic Security Summit

Cary provided overview of the event – "a roaring success!" 150 registered. Latifa Lyles, Director of the US Department of Labor Women's Bureau, spoke about how to support working women. Plenary session notes distributed and response requested.

Staff Updates

Cary reviewed the following projects: Budget process started. Hiring a new Executive Staff Assistant is underway. Next meeting is Nov. 18th, Advisory Council's legislative focus meeting.

Lilly reviewed the following projects: gubernatorial candidate forum next September, Equal Pay Day, Start Smart salary negotiation training.

Announcements

Marybeth – inaugurate mentoring program at VT Tech of Rosie's Girls launching at Women Can Do. Kerry Secrest – Women's Circles.

Julie introduced Vermont Women in Law Enforcement and spoke about attending recent conference of NY Women in Law Enforcement with 170 people. Great trainings and their founders will support Vermont's new organization.

Katarina spoke about the Senator's new women's health care reform legislation – she will issue a draft to be distributed to VCW. Highlights include: states won't be able to eliminate abortion services; mental health services available for DV Victims, substance abuse services, and Title 10 funding, cultural competency trainings for LGBT individuals.

Meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.