



VERMONT COMMISSION ON WOMEN

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 12th, 2018 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

32 College St, Montpelier VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Ed Adrian, Gretchen Bailey, Carol Buchdahl, Deborah Bucknam, Kellie Campbell, Lisa Carlson, Charlotte Dennett, Ruth Finn, Emilie Kornheiser, Kim Nolan, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Kerry Secrest, Lisa Senecal

Commissioners absent:

Mary Daly, Heidi Tringe

Advisors present:

Jen Horwitz by Skype of Let's Grow Kids
Karen Ames, Ashley Michelle Fowler, Kelly Moran, and Joanne Nelson, of Mercy Connections
Thea Wurzburg of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office
Diane Derby of U.S. Senator Leahy's Office
Sheila Reed of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office
Auburn Watersong of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Catherine Welch of Vermont Women In Higher Education

Guests: Edisa Muller; Kim Bushey, Program Services Director, VT Dept of Corrections; Theresa Stone, Superintendent, Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome and introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

Meeting Agenda Approval Process:

MOTION made by Carol and seconded by Ruth:

To approve the meeting agenda, giving discretion to the chair to deviate from the agenda as necessary.

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

Approval of November 2018 Minutes

MOTION made by Lisa, seconded by Carol:

To approve the November 2018 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.

2. Update from Vermont's Congressional Delegation

Diane Derby, Office of Senator Leahy

- A federal government shutdown is likely next week because of the President's 5-billion-dollar border wall request.
- Regarding the Title IX rulemaking process, there is a letter from two dozen senators expressing extreme concerns about the changes and the proposed language. Senator Leahy signed on. If VCW is going to weigh in on this, please feel free to reach out to congressional delegation for assistance.
- There is a proposed change of the definition of gender to exclude transgender folks.
- There is a bill in play now about providing support for pregnant workers as an ADA accommodation.
- The Farm Bill passed last night - would take hemp off the controlled substance list.
- The Criminal Justice bill is essentially a rewrite of the sentencing statutes, with bipartisan support.
- The VOCA funding STOP grant formula supports advocates in State's Attorney's offices, and a decision was made to make that an RFP this year from the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services. Victims Advocates no longer in Brattleboro or Bennington.
- Sen. Leahy Co-Proposed the Second Chance Act for folks coming out of incarceration. Idea is to reduce the recidivism rate. Hoping to reauthorize the grant.

Sheila Reed, Office of Senator Sanders

- The SNAP work requirements were not put into the Senate farm bill.
- Sen. Sanders will be working on these issues in the next session:
 - Drafting a universal childcare bill. Facebook video about the childcare crisis.
 - Increasing childcare development block grant funds. Intending to get more money into that.
 - Medicare for All will be reintroduced
 - Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15/hr
 - Paid leave bills

Thea Wurzburg, Office of Representative Welch

- There is a changing landscape in the new Congress. Welch will be supporting an equal pay act, the Federal Pregnant Workers Act, the Violence Against Women Act.
- Welch signed a letter to DeVos regarding the Title IX changes.
- The House will vote on the Farm Bill tomorrow.

3. Discussion of issues relating to incarcerated women in Vermont

Kim Bushey, Program Services Director, VT Dept of Corrections and
Theresa Stone, Superintendent, Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility

Kim Bushey and Theresa Stone came to discuss the status of incarcerated women in Vermont. They presented a PowerPoint, to be uploaded to our website along with these minutes.

Additional discussion not included in the presentation included:

- That no other state, as far as they know, houses their Department of Corrections (DOC) in the executive branch in the Agency of Human Services. In Vermont, the DOC Commissioner sits with other Human Services Commissioners and reports to the same Secretary. In most states, it would sit with public safety.
- A different voting structure has been implemented in the facilities, so there are two opportunities to register.
- As a state, we largely have a jail and detention population. 50% or more of people incarcerated are anticipating transitioning out, so they may not be taking the opportunity to vote if they will have the opportunity to do that in their home community.
- The Vermont DOC transitioned their offender management system about four years ago, and there have been challenges in regard to extracting data and reports. Largely, they still have to do things in terms of point in time snapshots. The women's population has decreased significantly, now steadily around 150 women daily average population, with about a third of those being detained pre-adjudication. 15 are serving 3 years or longer, 3 serving life.
- Substance abuse is an epidemic. The incarcerated population has an 80 – 94% rate of substance abuse and/or co-occurring disorder. Vermont is on the cutting edge of medically assisted treatment (MAT). The DOC has begun induction of buprenorphine. Federal regulations of methadone limit their ability to utilize this. Rhode Island is also working on induction, they use a contracted hub that comes in and does the dispensary.
- 500 have been inducted. In Chittenden County, women have long been identified as a priority population, higher risk. Currently, 80 women in CRCF are on medically assisted treatment. Women have a higher rate of substance abuse in part because women have historically always been more likely to go to the doctor, seek care, and been prescribed drugs. Women have always been more vulnerable to prescription drug abuse.
- Incarcerated inmates don't have Medicaid coverage and those expenses are paid for by general fund dollars. Once they come out, Medicaid picks up most of the cost.
- MAT is an experiment, as a state and for the incarcerated population. Part of the response is about a public health response; not about reducing recidivism or improving outcomes, but about harm reduction and to keep folks alive. There is no national data to look at.
- Programming
 - Women's population tends to have more volunteers, more interested parties in providing support.
 - Kids A Part, program of Lund, provides parenting education and support for incarcerated women and has for 15+ years. They report serving 212 unique moms over the course of the year. 90% of incarcerated women screened reported having minor children or were pregnant (132). Majority of the women are screened, but some in the detention population are in and out too quickly.

- Mandated services - listed offenders are required to engage in certain programming that is provided when they are getting ready to transition out, often in the last year. Women at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) have access to services once they are there, but services have capacity limits and might have a waiting period.
- Kathy Fox at UVM has been bringing college classes to the women, attendance is good. She's offering 14 women a class in the spring, and UVM students come in and take the class with them. They are exploring offering more employment and training opportunities. VOC Rehab has been coming in. Vermont Works for Women is a longstanding partner who provides services, and Rhino Foods is coming into the facility and doing job interviews.
- They received an Adult Reentry and Employment strategic planning grant, and what that grant allows is to work with Department of Labor and industry stakeholders to leverage opportunities and relationships to better align opportunities inside with opportunities outside. For example, they will be taking a look at whether there can be culinary training opportunities within the facilities. Women already work there, can that be more training and certification oriented? The DOC sits on the statewide workforce development board, and that is improving their ability to connect with industry leaders.
- Overall, the population has higher needs and is more complex than 20 years ago, more transitional needs; they largely had these needs prior to becoming involved in the criminal justice system.
- The DOC is working on developing and building peer support.

Diane Derby added that statewide, there are 7500 Vermonters on medically assisted treatment. Dr. John Brooklyn at UVM created a video about Suboxone, which can be viewed here. Diane reports the video is very helpful to understand the benefits of medically assisted treatment. Second Chance funding supports community justice centers and should not to be overlooked, as well as the Turning Point centers.

4. VCW response to call for public comments on proposed Title IX regulations

The group began discussing the proposed Title IX changes. Staff will continue to work on a draft of a public comment or statement about VCW's position on these proposed regulations. An ad hoc committee will support the staff in this work. Kim Nolan, Deb Bucknam, Lisa Senecal, Carol Buchdahl, and Catherine Welch from St. Michael's volunteered; Carol will chair and Hannah will join as staff representative.

VCW Staff will ask Advisors if their organization plans to issue public comment and take note of which are. Invite Advisors to join this ad hoc committee.

5. Vermont National Guard discussion

VCW briefly discussed the recent reports about the Vermont National Guard. Commissioners wondered where things are now, as lots of the reports are old. Some expressed disappointment that Gov. Scott

said in his press conference that an investigation isn't warranted. Others added that in the military, the investigation would likely be internal. Commissioners want to keep track of this and Lisa Carlson will see what she can find out.

5. Listening Project – discussion of possible recommendations

VCW Staff and Commissioners have been working on tagging survey responses in survey monkey. One of the questions we asked was about what needs aren't being met, and what could be done. Cary shared a handout containing a sample of answers, and asked Commissioners for their thoughts, and to discuss emerging themes. Responses generated included:

- One issue that stood out was affordable childcare – it's repeated over and over. Something around affordable childcare should be in our recommendations. Subsidized, high-quality childcare.
- Expanding universal childcare at schools.
- Access/knowledge of resources.
- Lack of public transportation.
- Lack of safe, affordable housing.
- Childcare regulations that restrict the availability of childcare. The goal posts keep changing, the process takes too long, etc.
- Millions of dollars have been spent on childcare research, advocacy, etc. All of this work will be coming to a head in the next month. We would need to take a number of months to catch up on all the work that's happening. What can we contribute to this discussion?
- Community Support.
- Medical gender discrimination.
- Equal Pay.
- Childcare availability for diverse shifts and needs.

Lisa Carlson volunteered to help tag. Hannah will be in touch.

6. Announcements

Our legislative luncheon is on the same day as the swearing in of new legislators. Commissioners wondered if extra family members can join us. Marcia expressed concern that the foundation can't afford to pay for all of the extra family members, but they could join if they paid for them. Families could be included if prepaid on Eventbrite. We'll clarify this in follow-up communications with legislators.

Deb Bucknam told the Commission that the VT Parent Representation Center recently released a report regarding DCF, and thinks the VCW should be interested because most people involved are mothers. She passed out the executive summary, and Deb would like us to focus on this. Essentially, the way the

system functions negatively impacts struggling mothers. They need support for reform, and the report includes specific recommendations. [Link here to the Bending the Curve report.](#)

Meeting Adjourned at 12:30 p.m.