

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 10th, 2018 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
32 College St, Montpelier VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Carol Buchdahl, Deborah Bucknam, Mary Daly, Ruth Finn, Danielle Martel, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Senecal

Commissioners absent:

Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Charlotte Dennett, Emilie Kornheiser, Nancy LaVarnway, Melinda Moulton, Colin Ryan, Kerry Secrest

Advisors present:

Jen Horwitz Kenney of Let's Grow Kids
Ashley Michelle Fowler of Mercy Connections

Guests: Tiffany Bluemle of Change The Story Vermont, Sen. Ginny Lyons, by phone, Ashley Moore of Main Street Alliance, Edisa Muller, and Jessica Nordhaus of Change The Story Vermont

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Call to order and approve agenda

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

Approval of the agenda postponed due to a lack of a quorum of Commissioners present.

2. Welcome & Introductions

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

3. Approval of November 2017 Minutes

Approval of the November 2017 meeting minutes postponed due to a lack of a quorum of Commissioners present.

4. VCW Policies and Committee Work

Those present broke out into Committees and discussed the Public Policies of the Vermont Commission on Women. Committees will continue to discuss necessary changes, and a compilation of suggested changes will be presented at the May 2018 meeting ahead of an anticipated vote at our June 2018 meeting.

5. VCW Listening Project

Cary passed around a working document which described the listening project. The project has five basic elements:

1. Public Forums
 - a. The Economic Equity and Security Committee is envisioning VCW holding 3-4 public forums around the state; potentially in Bennington, Brattleboro, the Northeast Kingdom, and in Franklin County.
2. Commissioners' Community Connections
 - a. Individual commissioners reaching out to people in their communities to learn what issues women and girls are facing.
3. Survey
 - a. A short, online-survey is being developed.
4. Story-Gathering
 - a. Change the Story is playing a strong roll in story-gathering. They intend to collect video of Vermonters telling their stories as they relate to the Change The Story data.
5. Report and Recommendations

Jessica Nordhaus discussed Change The Story's role in the listening project. They intend to support VCW in this work and in expanding capacity by collecting women's stories via video. They ran a trial at a Strolling of the Heifers event in Brattleboro, where it was very cold, so they didn't see a large turnout, but they were able to interview fellow non-profit group representatives, testing out some questions to see what resonated.

Tiffany Bluemle explained that CTS issued four reports, each with a different focus. The goal is for collected stories to be related to the data in the CTS reports. For example, CTS staff spoke with a teacher who felt like she makes a decent income, but she's worried about her adult children who feel like they can't be as ambitious in their careers because of the childcare shortage. It will be critical for us to reach out to communities and organizations to find people to share their stories.

6. Legislative Session Discussion

- **Economic and workforce development data and other policy with guest Tiffany Bluemle & Jessica Nordhaus of Change the Story VT**
 - CTS will be issuing one consolidated report with highlights from the four existing reports.
 - They would like to look at updated data to see if anything has changed in the last few years.
 - They are working with Let's Grow Kids and other organizations about conducting a survey to better understand the situation for women in Vermont.
 - CTS needs to do more outreach. Now that the reports are complete, they'll have more capacity to focus on generating awareness, institutionalizing data collection, and collecting and sharing women's voices & stories

- CTS is also working on alliance building through the Business Peer Exchange (BPE), which has been running in Chittenden County for the past two years. There are 20 or so employers involved right now, including VEIC, Dealer.com Casella, NRG, Shelburne Farms, Intervale, the City of Burlington, Ben and Jerrys, and Seventh Generation. The cohort drives the topics, CTS facilitates. In the past, they've discussed:
 - Rewriting job descriptions
 - Website audits, representation of women
 - Harassment & hostility
 - Pay audits
 - Implicit biasThey held a breakfast for senior leadership, 60 people in November, and are offering the opportunity for businesses to host conversations through some topic cards currently in development.
 - CTS is considering expanding the Business Peer Exchange to Rutland, the Upper Valley, Franklin County, and maybe hosting another Male Champions for Change event in Rutland.
 - They are discussing developing an Equal Pay Certification.
- **Paid family leave with guest Ashley Moore, Main Street Alliance**
 - Ashley is leading the Family and Medical Leave Insurance campaign, which publicly launched in October 2016. A coalition (including VCW) worked with the House on introducing a bill that would create a Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program, like 6 other states have already done.
 - They are working with the Senate on moving and strengthening a bill, and will hopefully get something to Gov. Scott's desk this year, although they may need to revisit this next biennium.
 - Ashley gave an overview of the bill as introduced and in its current form as passed by the House:
 - Bill as introduced:
 - Up to 12 weeks paid at 100% wage replacement to care for a new child, family member, or recover from their own serious illness, allow self-employment opt-in
 - Eligibility if worked 6 out of last 12 months.
 - As passed in the house: .141% payroll deduction
 - 6 weeks, 80% wage replacement, not for own illness
 - Removed self-employment
 - Requires workers to have worked 12 of the last 13 months
 - Note: This would be one of the least generous programs in the country
 - There is a cap on the amount to be assessed, so if there are not enough funds the benefits would be reduced as opposed to the payroll deduction being increased.
 - In both versions, administrative costs are included in the payroll deduction. The program would be administered by DOL, but they would likely need additional employees to administer it.

- **VT equal rights amendment with guest Senator Ginny Lyons (via phone)**
 - Sen. Lyons will be introducing a resolution asking the next legislative body to consider an Equal Rights Amendment. The clause would say: “Equal protection under the law shall not be abridged because of...”
 - 20 senators signed on to the resolution so far and she is expecting more will this week.
 - Sen. Lyons will introduce it next week, after which it will go to the Judiciary Committee, whom will consider the clause, make any changes they believe necessary, and may then it go to the full Senate for a vote.
 - Constitutional amendments can only be considered during certain legislative sessions, and the next time is 2019. Once introduced, the amendment must be passed first by the Senate, then by the House, and be signed by the Governor. Then it must pass again in the next consecutive legislative session (2021), and then be approved by the majority of voters, likely during the 2022 mid-term elections.
- **Sexual harassment**
 - Rep. Copeland-Hanzas, Cary, Hannah, and Lisa met with Damien Leonard of Legislative Council about a possible sexual harassment bill.
- **Child marriage**
 - A bill will be introduced shortly to clarify that the age of marriage is 18, and eliminate the opportunity for minors to marry with parental consent.
- **Alimony**
 - Cary passed around the recommendation letter issued by the Spousal Support & Maintenance Task Force, and summarized the recommendations:
 - The guidelines that judges must consider as they determine alimony passed in 2017 are scheduled to sunset in 2019. The primary recommendation of the taskforce was to extend the time frame to 2021 to get a better idea of how they are working.
 - Conduct a survey of judges, lawyers, and parties to learn how the guidelines are working and what they think of them.
 - Recommend that the impact of retirement be added as a factor judges consider in determining awards.
 - Change “permanent” to “long-term” in the statute.
- **Minimum wage**
 - The legislature is holding hearings on legislation to raise the minimum wage next week, Cary will testify. She will talk about the disproportionate impact on women. Additional thoughts are welcome, please share them with Cary.

7. Staff Updates

- Equal Pay Day is happening in April. Staff is still discussing what we might do this year.
- Women’s History Month is March. We will again partner with Vermont Historical Society on an event to be held on the March 15th, the third Thursday at noon at the Montpelier History Museum in the Snelling room. The event’s tentative theme is women making money in the arts. More information will be forthcoming.

- Cary is engaged in planning the next New England Women’s Policy Conference and is meeting next week with the regional planning group. The conference will likely happen in November 2018.
- Hannah will be asking Commissioners to join a planning committee for our next legislative lunch, to be held Wednesday, January 9th, 2019 at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Montpelier.

8. Announcements

Building Bright Futures is releasing their new report this morning which details great information about kids age birth – 8 and their families. It will be up on the website today, please check that out and share.

The Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance is holding update calls to dive deeper into issues they are focused on this legislative session, you can visit their website to register.

Meeting adjourned at 12:24 p.m.