

State of Vermont**Vermont Commission on Women**

126 State Street

Montpelier, Vermont 05633-6801

women.vermont.gov[phone]
[toll free]

802-828-2851

800-881-1561

Vermont Commission on Women**Meeting Minutes****Wednesday, May 12th 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.****Remote Meeting via video and teleconferencing****Commissioners present:**

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell, Mary Daly, Erica Hare, Sarah Mell, Ashley Messier, Kim Nolan, Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Lisa Carlson, Kerin Durfee, Wendy Knight, Kiah Morris, Lisa Ryan

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts, ANA Vermont
Dan Brown, Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Michelle Fay, Voices for Vermont's Children
Katarina Lisiaus, Office of Senator Bernie Sanders
Alison Lamagna with Vermont Works for Women

Guests: Al Johnson-Kurts & Jessica Nordhaus, Change The Story Vermont**Staff:** Cary Brown, Hannah Lane**Presiding:** Lisa Senecal**Recording:** Hannah Lane**1. Welcome and Opening**

Meeting called to order at 9:35 a.m.

Lisa Senecal welcomed everyone, and asked folks to respond to these questions in the chat:

- What are you reading?
- What springtime, Vermont food are you most looking forward to?
- "Before times" activity that you're most excited about resuming?

2. Announcements

Al is doing better with their knee surgery recovery.

Sarah commiserates and is excited to be getting back to the theater. They have been cast in VT Stage's return show, "Popcorn Falls"

Ashely is encouraging her staff to practice radical self-care and gave them a week off, paid. She has been noticing everyone is burnt out.

3. Approve minutes of April 2021**MOTION made by Nancy, seconded by Erica:**

**To approve the April 2021 minutes as submitted.
Hearing no nays, the motion is unanimously passed.**

4. Meeting Schedule

Commissioners discussed possible meeting schedules for FY2022. Among the points made were the following:

- wondered about hybrid meetings, in-person & remote, so folks can choose.
- the difficulty with hybrid meetings in the past, with our technology.
- wondered about shorter meetings or meeting every other month.
- would like to retain a standard meeting.
- What about the day of the week? Does Wednesday work?
- wondered how we can make our meetings more focused, and noted that advisory organizations aren't usually a part of every discussion. It makes the group very large and adds to time.
- noted that the people for whom this time doesn't work might not be here.
- the goal of the commission is to be supportive of the staff's work, and wondered if staff has thoughts about how we can do that better.
- Cary is in favor of an active committee structure. We haven't quite found the right structure, yet. It would be really helpful for there to be work happening between meetings, and to have committees working on topics we want to explore in more depth.
- A commissioner shared that she is on a national commission with a similar structure, and wondered if every other month the committees could meet, and then the other month the full commission would meet. The committees have trouble finding time to meet outside of this group.
- SURJ has just moved to this model, but they do a quick full-group check-in at the beginning.
- would like to take a look at how we assign work to committees and ensure we're working on the important issues.
- Cary shared that involved advisors at every step is one of the most helpful things to her in doing this work.
- the time of day and length of the meeting can be hard for members of the public to participate, and especially for groups of people we may not be hearing from them. We may want to think about an after-work hours meeting every once in a while if we want to increase participation.

Cary will poll commissioners about this and we'll try to put something together for next month.

5. Staff updates

Cary shared that we will have three interns working with us this summer, two from Middlebury and one from UVM. All three will be working on the Leadership & Public Life report, updating things from the CTS report, and will be eager to hear from you as we go through this process about what questions arise and what we might want to ask.

H.122, which concerns VCW's statute and would eliminate the anti-lobbying piece of our statute, looks like it's on the verge of passing.

S.10 contained a provision to provide a dependent benefit for people on unemployment, which the House has removed. Cary testified on this bill and shared that this is one way that we could start to address the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on women. We're trying to keep working parents centered in this conversation.

Michelle Fay, reflecting the reasons provided by House Commerce chair Marcotte for removing the dependent benefit from S.10, added that it might trigger a benefits cliff issue. House Human Services has been looking at the intersection of unemployment benefits and other benefits. The modeling so far has shown a net benefit to families.

Cary shared a menstrual equity update; the bill that will require menstrual products in schools has passed; one we're still watching is eliminating the sales tax on menstrual supplies.

Hannah shared that we are still looking for three more hosts for upcoming Equal Pay Day podcast episodes. Kellie shared that she's willing to share questions and offer suggestions to hosts.

Ashley – "Love the podcast ideas....I always wanted to do one on the wage and employment issues for women with criminal records"

CTS partners will present Leaders for Equity and Equal Pay (LEEP) Toolkit Launch at noon on June 8th to launch the new Pay Equity Playbook and tool. Kellie will open the event, Kerin will moderate the panel, and Evelyn Murphy, founder of The WAGE Project, Inc., will speak. Wendy has agreed to write an op-ed to help get the word out. Thank you for your energy and creativity!

Register: [leeplaunch.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)

Facebook Event: <https://fb.me/e/1kb164Cne>

We're hoping the event will drive Equal Pay Compact signers.

Jessica – "For folks who aren't familiar with it, the LEEP Toolkit contains a unique new tool for small to mid-size employers to run their own in-house, ongoing gender and racial equal pay reviews. It also contains a companion 60-page "Playbook" written by compensation experts highlighting some of the context and issues behind pay inequity and how-tos for change. It will be free and available to all employers in the state on the VCW and CTS partner websites."

Cary shared that we expect a one-time appropriation for Commissioner email addresses.

Kellie asked about public records requests, Hannah will share some guidance, and Ed shared his blog at <https://www.freedomandethics.net/>.

5. Looking inward and looking ahead – VCW planning process

Kiah was unavailable for this meeting, so Cary facilitated a discussion about future plans for strategic planning.

6. VCW chair structure and election planning

Lisa proposed that the Commission consider moving to a tri-chair model. The Commissioners discussed this. The question was raised as to whether it would be allowed under our statute. Cary will get a legal opinion on this question.

Cary called nominations open for the next two weeks. Nominating someone else works best if you know they are willing to be nominated. Self-nominations are appropriate. Cary and Lisa S are both available to discuss the role with anyone who reaches out.

7. Planning process for new women’s correctional facility/facilitiesCary wanted to update the commission about what’s happening in the legislature. The capital bill includes funding for Buildings and General Services to study and make plans for building a new women’s facility. \$0.5 million is being allocated this fiscal year and \$1 million next fiscal year. There has been a lot of discussion about what would be done with this money. A lot of those discussions have been prompted by advocacy. Cary has testified, as has Ashley, among many others. We have been calling for stakeholder engagement in the process.

Part of our role is to keep that advocacy going, but she also wants to talk about how VCW can be involved in this process. Commissioner Baker is committed to a process that includes focus groups of advocates to help figure out what should happen, and what process is necessary; they would pass that information to BGS. There is nothing in writing or any way right now to hold either department accountable to a plan.

When Cary testified, she had four specific recommendations: to require a planning process that prioritizes those who are most affected by incarceration; create a formal study committee to research alternatives to incarceration; direct the planning process to include research & recommendations around meeting the needs of residents and designing the facilities to meet those needs; and to direct the planning process to align with goals of Justice Reinvestment II work.

Commissioners discussed VCW’s role and there was a common sentiment expressed that it would be appropriate and useful for VCW to represent the voices of those who are most impacted.

Cary called for an Ad Hoc Committee, to work on this. Ashley, Sarah, VWW, and Lisa S. volunteered.

8. Closing

Action items:

- Continue in the search for facilitators
- Look at the legality of a shared chair structure.
- Nominations for chair are open for two week.
- Issue a poll on meeting dates, times, structure.
- Ad-hoc committee on corrections will meet.

Meeting Adjourned at **12:22** p.m.