

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 13th, 2019 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
109 State Street, Montpelier VT

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell,
Lisa Carlson, Mary Daly, Erica Hare, Emilie Kornheiser, Marcia
Merrill, Kerry Secrest

By phone/Skype:

Charlotte Dennett, Marybeth Redmond, Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Lisa Ryan, Kim Nolan

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA-Vermont
Charlie Gliserman and Matt Levin of Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Jessica Green of Girls on the Run VT
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids (by Skype)
Lyn Blackwell of League of Women Voters of VT
Shari Levine of Maternal & Child Health Division Vermont Department of Health (by phone)
Thea Wurzburg of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office
Diane Derby of U.S. Senator Leahy's Office
Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office
Sarah Robinson of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
VCW Commissioner Kellie Campbell, also representing Vermont Women in Higher Education
Alison Lamagna of Vermont Works for Women
Amy Brady of Voices for Vermont's Children

Guests: Edisa Muller, Aly Johnson-Kurts – Change The Story

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane and Lilly Talbert

1. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:38 a.m.

Lisa welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. Advisory Council legislative and policy priorities discussion

Diane Derby, Sen Leahy, reminds us they don't weigh in on state legislative issues. Their staff notes housing, mental health, and child care issues seem to be among the top issues from Vermont women that they hear about. The Senator's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, WEOC has been

partnering with Change the Story VT, and their data collection reflects issues. Response to opioid epidemic has dominated Diane's work of late. Recent funds from feds on housing.

Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office addressed the question about differences with regard to housing availability, folks in rural vs. urban areas setting different goals. This relates to the Senator's work on income inequality, and raising the minimum wage. Katarina says to be aware of federal legislation, particularly on childcare and pre-k, access to higher education, rental housing, increasing social security, Medicaid and Medicare. Those impact women more than men. Katarina will share events and stakeholder meetings concerning federal legislation and policy on our calendar when they align with our issues. All congressional delegations have casework teams, send them folks with any problems accessing federal programs. Sen. Sanders' social media platforms would be happy to share messages or short videos (1 minute long).

Thea Wurzburg of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office. House passed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, and it's now on to Senate. A question was raised about 2020 celebrations of suffrage centennial and also about bringing up the national ERA, commenting that Congress might focus on the ERA as part of next year's celebration. Diane addresses, says there is very little chance of it passing, right now, the Senate isn't even passing necessary funding bills. Message heard, talking points could be brought out.

Amy Brady of Voices for Vermont's Children – Voices is the Kids Count organization for Vermont; work is broken down into 4 domains.

- Economic security - end child poverty – fully fund Reach Up (basic needs for families with children). Currently meet 40% with stipends.
- Health – H219 creates doula Medicaid coverage. Doulas lower hospital costs, improved care.
- Education – truancy and absence response. Inequity in current process, pilot in Lamoille County - pull from court system to social work/restorative model.
- Children and families – paid family and medical leave. Ombudsman for Child Protection; collecting stories and info from communities; foster care can be positive when offered at the right time and for the amount of time it's needed. Child protection is a very private and secret system, makes this very hard to shine a light in the system, will be difficult to do from Montpelier, rather community by community, from families and from social workers. Would like to see Commissioners helping with that. Marybeth – sits on child protection oversight com – they need the stories, including those in which where is there unfairness and children removed due to poverty. Developmental Disabilities advocates are looking for same type of independent oversight position. Marybeth spoke about her knowledge of the CT Office of Child Advocate, which was independent and had access to files. It could nip in bud emerging problems – it worked. The office received and acted upon data and reports in a timely fashion. Again, the legislature needs stories! Emilie: working on providing safety and not retraumatizing for those providing stories. Amy is getting calls from folks with powerful stories but with identifying info, who are in support of the legislation, but don't want to step forward. Crisis in individual cases – systemic picture; especially non-court related cases. In meantime, encourage individuals to speak with Senators. Marybeth said help is needed to create a committee environment conducive to supporting compassionate and safe testimony.

Sarah Robinson of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence – they serve as statewide voice and represent member organizations Vermont’s 15 area dv/sv programs. Served 9K last year. For incarcerated women in VT, they operate DIVAs, providing dv services to women in CRCF (which is almost all!). Policies of interest:

- Good Samaritan law – from a legislative study committee looking at VT human trafficking/prostitution. Victims/witnesses of crimes given immunity, including for those exchanging \$ for sex.
- Expand criminal expungements for victims of dv/sv – as they might be victims of financial abuse, particularly in cases of check kiting, larceny or stealing. Finances are often a tool of power and control over victims.
- Alimony reform – ways to protect victims in this law, for ex: exemptions from being payor in alimony arrangement.
- Safer communities - victims may go to civil court for RFA – first place interacting with criminal justice. Point of danger when firearms are involved. ½ of all homicides in VT are dv related – majority w/firearms. More consistency in firearms removal in RFAs; giving law enforcement tools to remove. There is a Federal statute to remove guns in RFA cases, but it’s not codified in state law.
- Examining professional regulations for massage therapists: a recent case in Middlebury had 70 victims, the plea agreement stipulated the therapist couldn’t practice for 5 years. VT doesn’t regulate this profession currently. Secretary of State is studying – Network wants language addressing misconduct.
- Funding request for member orgs from the Governor and legislative – flat since 2008 – federal funding priorities changing and diminishing while costs (hotline, emergency shelters) are rising. Would love support.

Alison of Vermont Works for Women. They focus on women’s work readiness and employment, and addressing barriers. Affordable childcare and paid family leave, pay equity, gender-informed programs must address women’s needs. Apprenticeship and trainings for the unique needs of women. State funding for their trades program. CRCF program staffer cites housing, reentry support, alternatives to incarceration, and more mental health services as most pressing issues. VWW works with youth – career ed and exploration opportunities, with career and tech centers – changing culture around this so girls enroll and complete non-traditional programs. Gender informed recovery programs. Getting ready for the launch of CTS report. Alison addresses questions about work with youth: next week’s program for middle schoolers in Randolph – orients participants to be brave, take risks, get ready to learn – and they experience a full day of construction, law enforcement, agriculture and more. VWW holds speaker series with women in those occupations, and does professional development with Trailblazers program.

Aly Johnson-Kurts of Change the Story VT – combined 1st and 2nd report – launch is December 18th 8:30-11:00 at Barre Labor hall, variety of local leaders, participants from Capstone and VWW. Discussion tables. Panel presentation. Sign up ASAP. 150 seats. CTS will also present the report at our December 11th meeting. Report will be available on-line. Raised \$100,000 through viral social media campaign on BHS soccer team equal pay shirts – way more than the soccer team anticipated. Vermont Women’s Fund will advise on putting those funds to good use. Commissioners can help disseminate results statewide – with conversation cards – using datapoints from reports. Will update those cards with this report’s data.

Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids – strengthen and build movement to achieve affordable quality child care by 2025. This is a women-dominated field, and a critical resource for families and our economy. Financial assistance investment increased, plan to evolve Child Development – needs IT database system; stabilization grants to child care providers who serve families with subsidies; analysis ½ of infants and toddlers don't have regulation child care access; legislature providing funding; scholarships for early childhood educators; tech centers programs early educators. In 2020 (sneak preview) leg priorities:

- Investing in Early Educators: student loan repayment program. Early childhood TEACH scholarship program – covers associates, alternative, and apprenticeship program – adding bachelor's degree. Wage disparity supplement program – reduces turnover rate (12.6%)
- Childcare financial assistance – increased Prek and after school reimbursement rates. New survey will inform rate asks. IT infrastructure investment.
- Engage VT employers – increase capacity or support new programs.
- VT Universal PreK report released – outcome: successful especially portability. BBF is conducting community conversations how to address challenges and build on successes.
- Working with Mr. Chris and PBS to share findings and campaign
- Holding forums.
- No Small Matter film touring

Matt Levin – Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance. Tracking 14 issues this year, half already mentioned by their partners. The other issues include:

- Housing: Vermont affordable housing coalition, meeting now to go over their agenda
- Nutrition:
 - o VT Farm to School
 - o Hunger Free VT Universal School Meals – profound impacts on culture, better behavior, less stigma, better nutrition, reduces bureaucracy, no cash register in the cafeteria.
 - o VT Foodbank called Vermonters Feeding Vermonters, to purchase food from Vermont Farms
- Children's Integrated Services program: – A cross sector way to provide services to families at risk, regardless of income. The program results in better outcomes with collaboration and coordination but makes the funding streams braided. The Alliance will be advocating for more Funding.
- Parent Child Centers: Need increased funding.
- Benefits cliff aspect of raising the minimum wage: The Alliance remains concerned about net negatives to low-income families who may lose more benefits than they gain in income as a result of raising the minimum wage and will be a part of conversation to watch that issue. Increasing the childcare financial assistance program levels helped with this, but there are other benefits that may be impacted.

Jessica Green – Girls on The Run Vermont

3rd to 8th grade girls – volunteer coaches. Always in need of coach support. High school students and adults. 10 weeks, each team sets their own schedule, early – mid march, twice per week for 90 minutes, provide training in Jan and Feb, plus curriculum and materials. 2500 girls across the state participate. Funding goals, looking for additional funding to make the program more accessible.

Lyn Blackwell –League of Women Voters of Vermont

Empower voters through education, advocacy regarding access, and improving the voting system. On the national level, the league is focused on redistricting, money in politics, and campaign finance. In Vermont, they've been working on voter registration. We have early voting, automatic registration, and same day registration. There are some gaps, including teenagers who get their driver's license before reaching the voter age. The League is working with corrections system to make sure everyone who is incarcerated knows they can register for and exercise the right to vote.

- Has a representative on the Vermont Ethics Commission, which reviews government ethical standards, but they are trying to improve the oversight.
- Public Access TV, new telecommunications rules has reduced funding for public access television. Advocating for more funding.
- Locally, doing a series on criminal justice in Vermont, tonight at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library regarding health care in Vermont. Cary moderated the last event and Marybeth was on the panel.
- Major events: In February they will celebrate the 100th anniversary of LWV and will host a gala in Montpelier. The League has taken the lead in the coalition to celebrate the centennial of the 100th anniversary of the right of women to vote. 60 different organizations have signed on to support the effort. States all over the country have developed these coalitions. Learn more at VTSuffrage2020.org.

Meredith Roberts – ANA VT

Represents professional nurses in VT, advocates for health in VT. There are approximately 16,500 RNs in VT. They are looking at aging, the need for nurses is growing. Nurses face high risks of injury in the workplace, both from lifting patients and from experiencing violence at works. Nurses are more likely to be attacked at work than prison guards and police officers. Issues they are focused on include:

- Lower drug costs
- Refugee health care concerns
- Health benefit plans
- Pharmacist prescribing
- Higher education
- Nurse faculty recruitment - the vacancy rate is climbing at the same time we face a nursing shortage and hospital staffing problems
- Act 72 & 80
- Vermont Climate Health
- Nursing Compact
- Safe staffing bill that needs some work – ratios are something they resist because they need to be flexible
- Opioid Crisis Support – Act 182

Kellie Campbell – Vermont Women in Higher Education

Just had fall dinner, preparing for big spring conference. Accepting workshop proposals. Looking at sustainability of higher education. Just redid their website, check it out.

3. Approval of October 2019 Meeting Minutes

Approval of October 2019 Minutes

MOTION made by **Mary**, seconded by **Kerry**:

To approve the October 2019 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.

4. Staff Updates

Our next meeting in December will be held in Waterbury at the State Office Complex – arrive early to allow for time to find parking, get through security, and find the conference room.

5. Committee updates and discussion of paid family & medical leave legislation

Paid Family Leave Coalition is considering a response to the current bill as passed by the Senate last spring because it's been changed so much. Things that are not ideal include that it would be privately administered, it no longer includes medical leave, or temporary disability insurance, and it puts a cap on the amount of time that two parents can take for one child, or that siblings can take to care for the same parent or grandparent. We need to build programs that encourage men to take leave equally, and when parents have to divide up the paid leave between themselves women will more often take more time off and men will take less. If everyone is paying equally into the program, the leave should be administered equally to the participants, not connected to the recipient of the care.

6. Announcements

Kerry – the Women's Leadership Circles of Vermont launching in Rutland and she needs help identifying women leaders in Rutland County.

Lisa C. and Mary are working on an obesity project, and immediately recognized that what they need to do is start with small children in schools – would like to work with Dept. of Ed. To bring Home economics back to the high schools. Promote health effects of being obese.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:36 p.m.