

Cary Brown, Executive Director, Vermont Commission on Women
FY2017 Governor's proposed state budget
House Committee on Appropriations
February 3, 2016

Department Overview

The Vermont Commission on Women provides information and counsel and collaborates with state and community partners to address economic, social, and political equity and other matters of concern to women in Vermont. The Commission consists of 16 commissioners, appointed by multiple appointing authorities, and drawn from throughout the state from diverse backgrounds. An Advisory Council, representing 25 partnership organizations, provides information and assists the Commission. Staff includes an Executive Director, an Executive Staff Assistant, and a Communications & Program Coordinator.

The statutory responsibility of the Vermont Commission on Women is as follows:

Conduct studies of matters concerning women, and in furtherance of that responsibility may:

- (1) review Vermont statutes with regard to sex discrimination and other matters affecting the status of women;
- (2) educate and inform business, education, state and local governments and the general public about the nature and scope of sex discrimination and other matters affecting the status of women in Vermont;
- (3) serve as a liaison and clearinghouse between government, private interest groups and the general public concerned with services for women, and, in this regard, may publish a periodic newsletter to provide information to these constituencies;
- (4) promote consideration of qualified women for all levels of government positions.

Key Budget Issues

- Approximately **77%** of the Commission's budget is for personal services, providing for 3.00 FTE staff positions.
- Approximately **13%** is for allocated expenses such as fee-for-space, insurance and information technology (DII).
- Approximately **10%** covers all other operating expenses, such as commissioner travel reimbursement (mandated), staff travel, phone, printing/publications, postage, membership/dues, copier maintenance fee, computer repair and maintenance.

The total budget request for FY2017 is \$357,011. This represents a .2% increase over FY2016.

The personal services budget is 2.4% higher than FY2016, due to increases in salaries and fringe benefits, so in order to fulfill the request for a level-funded budget, the operating budget request is 7.3% lower than FY2016.

Reductions will be made in property maintenance, technology, travel/lodging and professional development, printing and binding, and postage. The potential impact to Vermonters will be in a

reduced ability to produce and disseminate hard copy versions of our publications; in particular, the production of the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont handbook may be curtailed.

The Commission has had some success in the past year leveraging additional funding and other resources in order to expand the reach of our work:

- We created an initiative called **Change the Story Vermont** with the Vermont Women’s Fund and Vermont Works for Women in order to significantly improve women’s economic security in Vermont. Using private funding sources to supplement the staff time we can provide under our existing appropriation, we have been able to contract researchers to create the most comprehensive reporting on women’s economic well-being in Vermont available.
- We were collaborating partners on a grant awarded by the Vermont Community Foundation to conduct **five community forums around the state exploring the impact and feasibility of a potential temporary disability and caregiver insurance program** in Vermont.
- We were awarded a grant directly in the amount of \$2,250 to deliver **salary negotiation skills training** to Vermont women in college, and to train additional trainers in order to significantly increase the capacity of Vermont to deliver this service.
- We were awarded a grant in the amount of \$173,794 from the United States Department of Labor to conduct a **paid leave feasibility study**. Legislative acceptance of this grant is still pending, which is why it does not show up in the FY2017 budget request, but this will be added in if the grant is accepted. The impact of this grant will also be felt on the FY2016 budget, and the specifics of that will also be provided if the grant is accepted.
- A partnership with Governor Shumlin’s office allowed us to launch the **Equal Pay Compact** initiative. Over 30 employers have already signed on to the Vermont Equal Pay Compact, indicating their commitment to take steps to close the wage gap in Vermont. These employers will be provided with resources and support to expand beyond simply paying their employees fairly, such as changing their recruiting practices to encourage more women to apply for STEM jobs.
- Participation in a group called the Vermont Women’s Collaborative identified a need for a new **statewide events calendar** to serve as one centrally located source for any event focused on issues of concern to women, and connected us with a volunteer who built it for us.

Results-Based Accountability

The Vermont Commission on Women is not currently included in the state’s Results-Based Accountability budget programs. However, we are in the process of moving towards this format, and addressing the RBA questions:

How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?

Our work is divided into three general areas:

1) PUBLIC EDUCATION

Addressing issues or publicizing current data through presentations and workshops to groups around Vermont; creation and distribution of educational publications; via media in interviews, articles and commentary; and on our social media channels.

Examples:

- Presentation to 70 people at the Greater Burlington Women's Forum on the topic of salary negotiation for women
- Women's History Month panel discussion event for 100 people in partnership with the Vermont Historical Society Women's History Project

Our Public Education efforts reached at least **18,665** individuals directly in 2015 – and thousands more through the 115 times we appeared in the media.

2) INFORMATION & REFERRAL

The commission offers both an online resource guide that helps Vermonters help themselves, and in information and referral service that gets the individual to the most appropriate and most local resource to resolve their issue. We often use our handbook, the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont, to help clients understand their rights and responsibilities. Our many unique publications help Vermonters understand topics such as sexual harassment, family leave, or running for public office.

Example:

Caller is single mother of a 3 year old. The custody agreement provides for shared physical parental rights and responsibilities, and grants the father weekend visitation. He has threatened to shoot the mother and child, has physically attacked the child's grandfather, has refused to return the child after visitation several times in the past, and has threatened to do so again. Caller wants to know what her options are, and whether she is required to send her son today to his father's. She says Legal Aid refused to help and her local police have told her they do not get involved in "civil matters" and would not force the return of the child. VCW reply: Explained that a Court order is enforceable and cannot be modified by anyone other than a judge, and referred to the Bennington office of Have Justice Will Travel's attorney John Lamson. Advised to call us back if she did not receive the assistance she's needing.

Our Information & Referral services reached at least **17,733** people, including:

- 411 direct responses to inquiries for help and information
- 9102 unique visitors to our website

3) PUBLIC POLICY

We work in coalition on monitoring and contributing to legislation that improves the status of women and girls. We provide data and information to legislators, advocates, and policy makers to clarify the impact of their work on Vermont women.

Examples:

State of Vermont**Vermont Commission on Women**

126 State Street

Montpelier, Vermont 05633-6801

www.women.state.vt.us[phone]
[toll free]

802-828-2851

800-881-1561

- 156 people participated in the Vermont Summit on Women’s Economic Security, discussing challenges and solutions around issues such as child care, access to employment, education, and wages.
- 120 business owners, legislators, representatives from non-profit organizations, human resource administrators, and community members attended five public forums exploring the impact and feasibility of a potential temporary disability and caregiver insurance program in Vermont.

Our Public Policy work reached at least **1,428** people. This does not include estimates of farther-reaching impacts of public policy work, e.g. the entire State of Vermont employment force, served by our work on the Governor’s Workforce Equity and Diversity Council.