

VT LEG #335516 v.1
Sunset Advisory Commission
Board and Commission Review – Vermont Commission on Women

The Commission reviews every State board and commission and takes testimony regarding whether each board or commission should continue to operate or be eliminated and whether the powers and duties of any board or commission should be revised. Each board and commission has the burden of justifying its continued operation. The Commission also reviews whether members of a board or commission should be entitled to a per diem and, if so, the amount of that per diem. In testifying before the Commission, you should be able to provide the following information:

1. In general, how often does the board and commission meet? Provide specific information on how often the board or commission has met in the past two fiscal years. Provide information on where agendas and minutes of meetings can be found.

The Vermont Commission on Women generally meets ten times per year. The general meeting schedule is the second Wednesday of the month, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., with the exception of July and August.

In FY2017, the commission met ten times. In FY2018, the commission met eleven times, because there was a special meeting called in order to discuss a time-sensitive issue.

Agendas and minutes can be found online: https://women.vermont.gov/who_we_are/meetings

2. Provide the names of members of the board or commission, their term length and expiration, their appointing authority, and the amount of any per diem they receive.

The commission has 16 members in staggered four-year terms, with four expiring each June 30. In the event that a commissioner is appointed to fill a seat that has been vacated mid-term, that person serves out the remainder of the original term.

As of July 1, 2018, all commissioners are entitled to receive per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010. Adding the per diem compensation was a change from the previous 54 years of the commission's existence.

Gretchen Bailey	Term expires: 2021	Appt by: Senate Committee on Committees
Eileen Boland	Term expires: 2018 ¹	Appt by: Governor
Carol Buchdahl	Term expires: 2019	Appt by: Vermont Democratic Party ²

¹ This term expired June 30, 2018 but has not been filled either by reappointment or by a new person. We received guidance from the Secretary of State's office that a person in such a spot could choose to remain on the commission or to leave, and she has chosen to stay.

² In the 2018 special legislative session, the Vermont Democratic Party and the Vermont Republican Party were removed as appointing authorities. The Speaker of the House and the Senate Committee on Committees, which previously had appointed three members each, were granted four appointments each. The current members appointed by the Democratic and Republican Parties remain on the commission until the expiration of their terms, at which time the seats will be appointed by the Speaker and the Committee on Committees.

Deborah Bucknam	Term expires: 2019	Appt by: Vermont Republican Party ³
Kellie Campbell	Term expires: 2022	Appt by: Senate Committee on Committees
Mary Daly	Term expires: 2021	Appt by: Governor
Charlotte Dennett	Term expires: 2020	Appt by: Governor
Ruth Finn	Term expires: 2019	Appt by: Governor
Emilie Kornheiser	Term expires: 2020	Appt by: Speaker of the House
Marcia Merrill	Term expires: 2020	Appt by: Senate Committee on Committees
Melinda Moulton	Term expires: 2018 ⁴	Appt by: Governor
Kim Nolan	Term expires: 2022	Appt by: Speaker of the House
Marybeth Redmond	Term expires: 2021	Appt by: Speaker of the House
Kerry Secrest	Term expires: 2020	Appt by: Governor
Lisa Senecal	Term expires: 2021	Appt by: Governor
VACANT	Term expires: 2019	Appt by: Governor

3. Provide an overview of the board or commission's purpose.

The purpose of the Vermont Commission on Women is to advance rights and opportunities for women and girls in Vermont.

In furtherance of that purpose, VCW conducts research and study of issues affecting the status of women in Vermont; advises and consults with the executive and legislative branches of State government on policies affecting the status of women in Vermont; educates and informs 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; serves as a liaison and clearinghouse between government, private interest groups, and the general public concerned with services for women.

4. Is that purpose still needed? What would happen if the board or commission no longer fulfilled that purpose?

The VCW's purpose is strongly needed. Women in Vermont still face inequities in earnings, employment, safety, leadership, and many other areas. Women in Vermont earn just 84% of what men in Vermont earn. They are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to be unable to meet their basic financial needs, and more likely to be single parents. Women in Vermont continue to experience disproportionate domestic and sexual violence, and are experiencing sexual harassment at rates estimated as high as 70-80%. Women are underrepresented at the highest levels of leadership in almost every arena in Vermont, often dramatically so. Just 8 out of the top 100 companies in Vermont have CEOs who are women; just one statewide elected official is a woman; and Vermont is the only state in the country that has never sent a woman to represent it in Congress.

The Vermont Commission on Women is the only entity in Vermont that expressly considers the broad implications of state policy and budget priorities for women as they impact all aspects of women's lives. Many of our partner organizations consider distinct pieces of that puzzle, but no other organization is

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attempting to address that full picture. Without our work, the state would be missing any comprehensive and cohesive work that knits together varied interests and provides the missing voices for policy and program development.

We are the only clearinghouse for data and research specifically concerning women in Vermont, providing information to support the work of legislators, advocates, the media, business, and leadership development organizations. Without our work, there would be no ready source for the full range of information that we provide.

We are the only one-stop source for information and referral for thousands of Vermont women – particularly low-income, rural woman with limited access to resources and supports – who have exhausted other resources or whose needs are so complex they don't know where to turn. Without our work, many Vermonters would have significantly more difficulty finding the help they need.

We create and distribute publications that are unique in Vermont, providing comprehensive information on women's legal rights. Without our work, these publications would not exist, and Vermonters would not have the ready access to this information that we now provide.

5. How well is the board or commission performing in executing that purpose? What evidence can you provide to substantiate that performance?

The Vermont Commission on Women is extremely effective in executing its purpose. Thousands of Vermonters are reached in our work, through our Information and Referral Service, our public education campaigns, our research, our publications, our policy briefs, our legislative testimony, our presentations, and our partnerships.

Legislators frequently request our testimony and input as they consider issues of concern to women in Vermont. Other State agencies request our collaboration and information as they seek to understand the impact their work has on women, as do organizations and businesses in the private sector.

Our Change the Story project has produced the most comprehensive research on women's economic status in Vermont. In partnership with the Vermont Women's Fund and Vermont Works for Women, this project's research has spurred tremendous activity around the state as more people grow to understand the importance of women's economic advancement.

The coalitions and collaborations such as these that we engage in are far-reaching and powerful, spanning the state as well as New England. Our work has contributed to Vermont being recognized as a leader in legislation and policies related to sexual harassment, equal pay, and engagement of private sector partners.

Our Advisory Council is made up of 27 organizations that share our mission. They include direct service providers, advocacy organizations, and government offices. They provide valuable "boots-on-the-ground" perspective to the commission, and we provide them with networking and connections across program and policy areas.

The General Assembly recognized our strengths in providing effective and collaborative public education by appropriating \$125,000 to us in Act 183 for the purposes of implementing a public outreach and education campaign on sexual harassment and workplace discrimination.

In 2018 we have been conducting a statewide initiative we call the Listening Project, consisting of several elements soliciting public input, including an online survey. While results are still being compiled, we have over 2100 responses, and a tiny sampling of those include the following - non-scientific - indications that there is recognition of the value of our work:

- You're doing great work. Thank You.
- Thank you for helping women in our community.
- Thank you for your work and interest in this arena. The work you do I know is pointed to women but the success will of course help all people. We need every person at the table fully participating in all aspects of life across the various decades of life.
- what can I do to help?
- Thanks for providing an educational outlet.
- Thank you so much for this work - I am not in need but I am so grateful that you are helping those who are in need.
- You are doing amazing work! Thank you!
- Thank you for making these issues more public
- Thank you for this important work. The most effective way to help a society is to empower its women and girls.
- Female representation at all levels is so important — thank you!
- Love the ways you are getting women to talk about critical issues together
- Thank you for asking and for working to make life better for Vermont women and families.
- Thank you for your amazing work! Women need support leading independent lives and this state is a tough place to do this.
- I really appreciate this survey and the focus of the commission. I think Vermont really cares about its citizens, and there's a lot of potential to make this state one of the best for women in the nation.
- Thank you for doing this work! Women are backbone of our community, and I look forward to seeing what's comes of this study.
- I deeply appreciate all the efforts put forth by your organization and feel privileged to live in a state that values the status of women and, does a good deal more than simply checking in with us on an occasional basis--THANK YOU!

6. If the purpose is still needed, can State government be more effective and efficient if the purpose was executed in a different manner?

Additional resources directed towards staffing the Vermont Commission on Women would absolutely increase our reach and our effectiveness; however, we are not calling for that at this time, in recognition of current budgetary limitations facing State government.

7. If the purpose is still needed, do any of your board or commission's functions overlap or duplicate those of another State board or commission or federal or State agency? If so, is your board or commission still the best entity to fulfill the purpose?

The United States Department of Labor has a Women's Bureau with a regional office in Boston. They are the only other state or federal agency that is concerned with the work and wages issues that we work on in Vermont, but their focus is limited both topically and geographically. We are the only entity currently fulfilling the purpose, and we are the best entity to fulfill the purpose.

8. Does the board or commission's enabling law continue to correctly reflect the purpose and activities of the board or commission?

Yes.

9. Provide a list of the board and commission's last fiscal year expenditures including staffing costs.

How are these funded?

FY2018 ACTUAL EXPENSES

Personal Services: \$302,053

Operating Expenses: \$76,860

These were funded by an appropriation from the General Fund of \$376,913 and from a VCW special fund of \$2000.

10. Is the board or commission required by law to prepare any reports or studies for the Legislature, the Governor, or any State agency or officer? If so, have those reports or studies been produced?

Does the board or commission have ongoing reporting obligations?

No, the commission is not required by law to prepare any specific reports or studies, nor does it have ongoing reporting obligations outside those related to Results Based Accountability that are required in the budget process, the same as other State agencies.

The commission does, however, prepare many reports and studies that are shared with the public and the Legislature, including a regular analysis of the gender composition of all state boards and commissions and its correlation to compensation.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

1. How well the Commission works as an independent entity that is not associated with any other State agency or department (for ex., not relying on a State agency or department to staff or organize their meetings)

As an independent agency of the government of Vermont, we operate much as other State agencies do. Our staff of three performs all the necessary work to support the function of the commission. We have the same operational relationship to other parts of State government as any other State agency, and have never found that our independent status hinders us or those operations in any way, and in fact is an asset in fulfilling our purpose.

2. How the Commission operates in order to comply with 3 V.S.A. § 22(i) of their enabling law, which prohibits the Commission from using State funds to advocate for legislative or administrative action

Our work is designed to be informative, educational, and advisory in nature. We provide research, data, information, and resources to assist the Executive and Legislative branches in their work. When we provide legislative testimony, its nature is informational. Contracts we issue contain a provision specific to us to ensure compliance with our law, stipulating that no funds can go directly or indirectly to legislative or administrative advocacy.

Legislative or administrative advocacy is defined for the purposes of our law as employment of a lobbyist as defined in 2 V.S.A. chapter 11, or employment, establishment, or maintenance of a lobbyist position whose primary function is to influence legislators or State officials with respect to pending legislation or rules. We have no such position on our staff, and we employ no lobbyists.

The Vermont Commission on Women is the only commission in Vermont with such a prohibition.