

Vermont Commission on Women FY2020 Governor's proposed state budget
Senate Committee on Appropriations
March 12, 2019
Cary Brown, Executive Director, Vermont Commission on Women

Department Overview

The Vermont Commission on Women is an independent, non-partisan state agency dedicated to advancing rights and opportunities for women in Vermont. The Commission:

- advises and consults with the legislative and executive branches of state government on policies affecting the status of women in Vermont;
- conducts research and study of issues 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; and
- serves as a liaison and clearinghouse between government, private interest groups and the general public concerned with services for women.

The Commission consists of 16 commissioners, appointed by multiple appointing authorities, and drawn from throughout the state from diverse backgrounds. An Advisory Council, representing 27 partnership organizations, provides information and assists the Commission.

The Commission is staffed by an Executive Director, an Executive Staff Assistant, and a Women's Commission Program Coordinator.

Key Activities

We have continued active work on an initiative called **Change the Story Vermont**, a partnership created with the Vermont Women's Fund and Vermont Works for Women, aimed at significantly improving 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. In FY2018 we began work on updating two of the reports.

Change the Story's Business Peer Exchange continued to bring employers together for a year-long, facilitated program of monthly meetings to support their efforts at gender equity in the workplace. They shared best practices, learned about new approaches, and built allies with each other and within their workplaces. This work continues with new groups of employers and our hope is to replicate it in new parts of the state.

The **Vermont Equal Pay Compact** is a voluntary pledge that employers make to indicate their commitment to taking steps to close the gender wage gap. Fifty-seven employers signed on in FY2017. These employers are encouraged to take steps that expand beyond simply paying their employees fairly, such as changing their recruiting practices to encourage more women to apply for STEM jobs.

Our work providing advice and counsel to the executive and legislative branches included **testimony on bills** regarding establishing a paid family and medical leave program, accommodations for pregnant employees, prohibiting employers from requiring salary history from prospective employees, reducing sexual harassment, increasing the minimum wage, and others.

Our **Information and Referral Service** efforts included:

- a **statewide events calendar** to serve as one centrally located source for any event focused on issues of concern to women, which continued to see growth in FY2018
- continued updating of our electronic newsletter and other **Internet-based communications**, resulting in significant increases in the number of people reached
- updating our **Legal Rights of Women in Vermont** handbook, including printing and distributing hard copies in binders
- **direct responses to inquiries** for help and information via phone and email

Our **Public Education** efforts included 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.

In FY2018 we created and released two **educational videos** designed to inform employers and employees about new rights and responsibilities under the new **pregnancy accommodations law**. Both videos have been viewed and shared widely, and we have received feedback from state agencies and attorneys that they are using them in their work.

We launched a statewide **Listening Project**, designed to gather comprehensive qualitative data on the experiences of women throughout the state. The project began with the opening of a statewide survey and continues into FY2019 with a series of public events

Program Performance Measures Budgeting

Our FY2020 budget request includes the following performance measures:

Population-level outcome:	Vermont has a prosperous economy
Population-level indicator:	The percentage of Vermont women age 18+ who are below 200% of Federal Poverty guideline (31.5% in 2015)
How much did we do?	We measured the number of employers who were contacted about possibly signing on to the Vermont Equal Pay Compact: 22 in FY2015 160 in FY2016 140 in FY2017 18 in FY2018 10 projected in FY2019 10 forecast for FY2020
How well did we do it?	We measured the percentage of employers contacted who then signed on to the Vermont Equal Pay Compact: 100% in FY2015 44% in FY2016 43.5% in FY2017

100% in FY2018
 100% projected in FY2019
 100% forecast for FY2020

Is anyone better off?

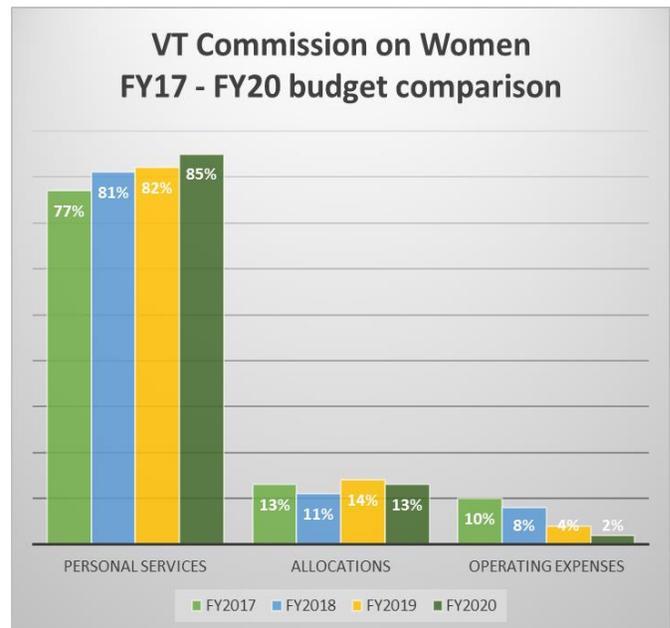
We measured the number and percentage of Vermont Equal Pay Compact signers who articulated specific strategies to improve:

9, or 40.9% in FY2015
 46, or 69.69% in FY2016
 40, or 66% in FY2017
 14, or 77.7% in FY2018
 10, or 66.6% projected in FY2019
 10, or 66.6% forecast for FY2020

All of the numbers measured for the Vermont Equal Pay Compact are higher in FY2016 and FY2017 because in these years we had carry-forward funds that allowed us to contract with someone who could be out in the field, visiting employers and signing them on. We did not have that surplus funding available in FY2018 and our numbers declined accordingly.

Key Budget Issues/Pressures/Ups and Downs

- Approximately **85%** of the Commission's budget is for personal services and per diem expenses
- Approximately **13%** is for allocated expenses such as fee-for-space, insurance and information technology
- Approximately **2%** - **\$9059** - covers all the operating expenses over which we have any control:
 - office supplies and repairs
 - telephone
 - printing and postage
 - commissioner travel reimbursement (mandated), and staff travel



The total budget request for FY2020 is \$393,131. This represents a **2.5% increase** over FY2019.

The personal services budget is **5.4% higher** than FY2019, due to increases in salaries and fringe benefits.

Due to ongoing annual efforts to remain as close as possible to a level-funded budget, very little opportunities for reductions in other areas exist. However, we were able to renegotiate our space usage with BGS and turn some of it back over to them, decreasing our office space and thereby **reducing our fee-for-space charges by almost \$9000.00**. This has resulted in our operating budget being **10.8% lower** than in FY2019.

Statement of Impact

Continued reductions in our operating budgets over the last several years have resulted in a sharp decrease in the availability of hard copies of our publications to the public. Much of this decrease flows naturally – and without harm – from the shift towards the Internet for sharing information. We have seen huge rises in the traffic to our website that correlate with downturns in the phone calls we get, as well as in requests to mail out hard copies of materials. However, there are still quite a few places and populations in Vermont for whom the Internet is not a reliably accessible means of getting information, and we have received feedback that our materials are not widely enough distributed, and that our presence is not adequately felt all across the state.