

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
PRELIMINARY PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF THE
Women's Commission

**The Women's Commission Is Moving
in the Direction of Developing a Unique
and More Active Role in Advocating
Changes to Improve the Status of Women
in West Virginia**

**The West Virginia Women's Commission
Needs to Improve Its Compliance with the Open
Meetings Law**

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
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May 2001

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John Sylvia
Director

May 6, 2001

The Honorable Edwin J. Bowman
State Senate
129 West Circle Drive
Weirton, West Virginia 26062

The Honorable Vicki V. Douglas
House of Delegates
Building 1, Room E-213
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0470

Dear Chairs:

Pursuant to the West Virginia Sunset Law, we are transmitting a Preliminary Performance Review of the *Women's Commission*, which will be presented to the Joint Committee on Government Operations on Sunday, May 6, 2001. The issues covered herein are "The Women's Commission Is Moving in the Direction of Developing a Unique and More Active Role in Advocating Changes to Improve the Status of Women in West Virginia" and "The West Virginia Women's Commission Needs to Improve Its Compliance with the Open Meetings Law."

We conducted an exit conference with the *Women's Commission* on April 27, 2001. We received the agency response on May 1, 2001.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


John Sylvia

JS/wsc

Joint Committee on Government and Finance

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Executive Summary

Issue 1: The Women's Commission Is Moving in the Direction of Developing a Unique and More Active Role in Advocating Changes to Improve the Status of Women in West Virginia.

In January 1999 the Legislative Auditor issued a preliminary performance review of the Women's Commission. The Commission was found to be ineffective in achieving significant change. The initial report recommended the discontinuance of the Women's Commission. The Legislative Auditor concluded that *"...If the Legislature chooses not to terminate the Women's Commission, then the Legislature should consider giving the Women's Commission a three year continuance ... to improve its effectiveness and develop a unique (non-duplicative) and more active role in advocating for changes...."* The Legislature gave the Commission a three year continuance.

This review comes two and a half years into the Commission's three year continuance. The review finds that the Women's Commission has taken seriously the recommendations of the 1999 report and is moving toward developing a unique and more active role in advocating changes. The Commission has evaluated its projects to reduce duplication and expand its audience. It has drafted original legislation to support Commission goals. This addresses a major deficiency in that the Commission did not have an adequate legislative initiative. The Commission has also obtained a \$16,000 grant to augment its limited budget. **Overall, the Commission is more conscious of the need to devote its limited resources to activities and issues that have limited support or that cannot be developed without the Commission's assistance, instead of areas that have widespread support and awareness.** This change in approach should place the Women's Commission in a unique and leading role in women's issues.

The Legislative Auditor found that there were still areas of the Women's Commission that would benefit from development. They include developing public policy positions, website enhancement, and utilizing the media to publicize important women's issues.

Issue 2: The West Virginia Women's Commission Needs to Improve Its Compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

The Legislative Auditor found that the Women's Commission was inconsistent in noticing its meetings with the Secretary of State. This is in violation of state law and the Women's Commission procedural rule. The effect of inconsistent noticing did not appear to be significant, but potentially meeting attendance could be adversely impacted.

Review Objective, Scope and Methodology

This preliminary performance review of the West Virginia Women's Commission is required and authorized by the West Virginia Sunset Law, Chapter 4, Article 10, Section 5 of the West Virginia *Code*, as amended. The Women's Commission is mandated to advocate and educate on issues relating to women.

Objective

The objective of this evaluation is to determine the response of the Women's Commission to recommendations made in a previous preliminary performance review issued in January 1999.

Scope

The scope included a review of the recommendations made in the 1999 evaluation, and the actions the Women's Commission has taken as a result of the review. The scope also included an assessment of the events sponsored by the Women's Commission, the effect of new technology in expanding participation in events, and the utilization of the media. In addition, the Commission's compliance with the Open Meetings law was also examined.

Methodology

The methodology included a review of the Women's Commission minutes, a review of the Commission's Annual Reports, a review of press releases, interviews with Commission staff, and observation of several Commission events. The performance evaluation complied with **Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards**.

Issue 1: The Women's Commission Is Moving in the Direction of Developing a Unique and More Active Role in Advocating Changes to Improve the Status of Women in West Virginia.

In January 1999, the Legislative Auditor issued a preliminary performance review of the Women's Commission, an agency created in 1977 to advocate and educate on issues relating to women. The Women's Commission was found to be ineffective in achieving significant change due to: 1) relying primarily on dissemination of information; 2) its lack of an effective legislative initiative; and 3) its duplication of state programs developed since 1977. The Legislative Auditor concluded that "... *If the Legislature chooses not to terminate the Women's Commission, then the Legislature should consider giving the Women's Commission a three year continuance to give it the opportunity to improve its effectiveness and develop a unique (non-duplicative) and more active role in advocating for changes which it believes would improve the status of women in West Virginia.*" The use of "unique" and "non-duplicative" is to encourage the Commission to direct its limited resources to issues or programs that have limited support or that cannot be developed without the Commission's assistance, instead of areas that have widespread support and awareness.

Women's Commission Responds to the 1999 Report

This current review, two and a half years through the continuance, finds that **the Women's Commission has taken seriously the recommendations of the 1999 Legislative Auditor's report and is moving toward developing a unique and more active role in advocating changes.** The Commission Chair encouraged members by stating, "*We have our work cut out for us...Now we have got to show the legislature what a group of strong, hard-working women can do. And we will.*" The day after the report was presented, the Executive Director resigned. In the year and a half following the review, the Commission hired a new director, secretary and program manager. A review of the Commission's meeting minutes reflects the following four attempts by the Commission to implement the Legislative Auditor's recommendations:

1. **Evaluating projects to reduce duplication and expand audience.** This resulted in the discontinuation of participation in "Take Our Daughters to Work Day." In deciding to discontinue participation in this event, the Commission cited the 1999 audit recommendation to avoid duplication of effort. The Commission acknowledged that its participation in the event was not critical to its success. The Commission also indicated that the event was not a statewide function and the Commission was "*striving to cover the state.*"¹ In reducing duplication, the Commission has taken on projects in which its resources are needed. In doing so, the Commission's assistance places it in a unique and leading role in these events.
2. **Forming coalitions in areas where the Women's Commission had previously not been actively involved.** This is reflected in the coalition with the West Virginia Bureau of Public

¹*Women's Commission, July 26, 1999, minutes.*

Health (BPH) and support of the Bureau's "Healthy People 2010 Objectives." This is a ten year commitment to promote certain health objectives in conjunction with the Division of Women and Perinatal Services of BPH.

3. **Initiating legislation to support Women's Commission goals.** The Women's Commission held several discussions about the need to monitor legislation and perhaps hire a lobbyist. The Commission hired an attorney to draft four bills for the 2001 session, and it made specific plans to monitor the session. **These bills are the first legislation drafted by the Women's Commission in its history. This action addresses a major deficiency identified by the Legislative Auditor.** The original bills related to:
 - Report of gender-based information on hiring and promotion within the classified service;
 - Conduct presumptively constituting abandonment;
 - Authorizing programs for promotion of folic acid supplementation; and
 - Hospital benefits for mothers and newborns; coverage for medical treatment of postnatal depression.
4. **Seeking grants to augment the Women's Commission's limited budget.** In 1999 the Commission obtained a \$16,000 grant to defray costs of reprinting a domestic violence booklet. **This was the first time in several years that the Commission obtained such a grant.** It held two grant writing workshops in 2000. The first was a short program during Women's Day at the Legislature, and the second was a full day workshop later in the year.

New Activities

Throughout the year, the Women's Commission presents various activities. In 2000, the Women's Commission sponsored or co-sponsored seven events, four of which were new. A previously co-sponsored event, "*Take Our Daughters to Work Day*" was eliminated. The Director spoke at meetings of business and professional groups, church groups, and farm women's clubs. The Director also contacted all state representatives and senators as part of a national initiative to identify qualified women candidates for appointment to federal agencies and departments.

The Legislative Auditor examined the Women's Commission new activities during 2000 to assess how many women were actually involved in these events, and whether the new events were reflective of a non-duplicative and more active role in advocating changes in the status of women.

The new Women's Commission events were:

- **Student essay competition.** In 1999, forty middle and high school students competed for prizes of savings bonds in a student essay competition titled "*Writing West Virginia Women Into History*". This competition grew to 193 entries in 2000, and plans were made to expand to include college students in 2001. This event was initiated by the Women's Commission.

- ◆ **Grant-writing workshop.** Eighty-one women participated in this workshop. Its goal was “everyone will leave with information in hand to enable him or her to write successful grants.” This workshop included a professional grant-writer, and presentations by the Benedum Foundation, the Ms. Foundation, West Virginia University and Wesleyan College.
- ◆ **Science teleconference.** This event was cosponsored with the Women’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, and titled “A Brave New World: Preparing Girls for Emerging Technologies - A West Virginia Perspective.” This conference involved over 1,000 participants, and included a presentation prepared by the Women’s Commission featuring middle school students, and four women employed in science and technology in West Virginia. A telephone connection allowed viewers to call in with questions. The teleconference was broadcast using the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) educational network and was viewed at middle school sites around the state.
- ◆ **Health teleconference.** Co-sponsored with the Department of Health and Human Resources, and produced by the New York State Department of Health, this teleconference was targeted to a professional audience. It was titled, “*Women’s Health Grand Rounds - Women First: Dialogues on Healthcare Access and Delivery for Women With Disabilities*”. Ten attended this presentation at one site in Charleston.
- ◆ **2001 Women’s Appointments Project.** The Commission joined with the National Women’s Political Caucus and the National Council of Women’s Organizations to write letters to all elected state legislators requesting the identification of qualified women candidates for appointment to federal agencies and departments.
- ◆ **Printing Grant.** The Commission received a \$16,000 Violence Against Women grant for the 4th reprinting of *Stop the Hurt: A Handbook for Victims of Family Violence in West Virginia*. The grant allowed 102,000 copies of the booklet to be printed in 1999 and shipped directly to domestic violence programs across the state. The grant was from the West Virginia Division of Criminal Justice Services. This was the first grant that the Women’s Commission had obtained in several years.

The Legislative Auditor finds that these new activities to some extent reflect a unique role in advocating for changes to improve the status of women in West Virginia. The Commission is making an effort to devote resources to issues and events that need the Commission’s assistance. For example, the Science Teleconference reached an audience of over 1,000 participants in West Virginia. Although it was designed by the U.S. Department of Labor, the success of the program in West Virginia was in large part due to the support and involvement of the Women’s Commission. West Virginia’s Science Teleconference had a greater number of participants than most of the programs in surrounding states. Also, the Student Essay Competition is a growing event that only the Commission sponsors. **These events illustrate a change in focus by the Commission to avoid duplication by dedicating resources to programs that cannot be developed without the Commission’s involvement.**

Use of Technology Expands Audience

The use of the DHHR educational network for the science teleconference significantly expanded the Women's Commission's audience. Female students were able to attend at their own schools, and the format encouraged personal interaction with telephone calls being accepted "live." With over a thousand people present, this is an example of an event where technology was used to reach a statewide audience.

The Commission should continue to sponsor events with multiple geographical participation, and consider the use of technology to bring traditional events to multiple locations. Traditional activities are held at one place, and depend upon participants going to the location. In addition, fees charged for the Women's Day at the Legislature and the Annual Town Meeting may also limit attendance.

Policy Positions And Greater Media Attention Are Needed

The West Virginia Women's Commission does not have direct press contact and has not utilized the media to broadly inform the community about its concerns for women. The Commission does issue press releases through the Department of Health and Human Resources. However, these releases are used only to provide notice of upcoming events. The Commission relies on internal means to publicize itself. It uses two mailing lists which total approximately 1,000 names, and an e-mail list with 500 names. The Director and Commissioners also utilize speaking engagements. The reliance on mailing, e-mail lists and speaking to established groups has the effect of limiting its audience.

One of the aspects of advocacy is to bring issues to the public, and to keep these issues in the spotlight of public awareness. Several Commissions in other states use press releases to highlight issues, direct attention to the effects of new legislation on women's lives, and publicize national reports about the status of women. In Vermont, the Governor's Commission for Women initiated nine issue-oriented press releases during 1999-2000, and authored four essays which were carried in the "Op Ed" sections of newspapers. The Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women created four issue-related press releases in 2000, as did the Michigan Women's Commission. By contrast, West Virginia released no issue-oriented press releases in the same time period. A broader use of the media will not only focus attention to areas of concern by the Women's Commission, but also inform a larger audience of women about these concerns.

The West Virginia Women's Commission maintains a website with the address <http://www.wvdhhr.org/women/>. The website presently has a copy of the Commission newsletter, dates and information for upcoming events, and the text of selected Commission publications. It could be expanded to include issue-related press releases, and opinion pieces. It could also be used to post comprehensive referral information on resources for women. Publicity about the website address might enable more women to learn about the Commission.

In addition, effective commissions such as the Vermont Governor's Commission on Women have policy positions on issues affecting women. Vermont has over 50 policy positions that are used to guide the commission. The State of North Carolina lists 38 public policy positions. By contrast the West Virginia Women's Commission has **no public policy positions** that are clearly defined as such, to guide its activities.

Conclusion

The Women's Commission has taken seriously the recommendations of the Legislative Auditor's 1999 report. A review of the Commission's minutes indicates that there is a conscious effort to reduce unnecessary duplication in sponsoring events. One traditional event is no longer co-sponsored by the Commission because it recognized that the Commission's resources were not critical to the event's success, and resources could be better used elsewhere. **By devoting resources to events or issues that need its assistance, the Commission places itself in a unique and leading role in advocating women's causes.**

The Science Teleconference was successful in reaching a statewide audience to encourage young women to pursue careers in the field of science. The involvement of the Women's Commission was important to its success. The Student Essay Competition draws attention to women in history and it appears to be a growing event. The Commission should continue to seek ways to be involved with events that reach relatively large audiences, and make use of technology when possible to expand some of its traditional activities, such as the annual town meetings.

In addition to the new events, the Executive Director developed a closer connection with the National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW). The director attended the national conference in 2000 and subsequently accepted an invitation to become a board member for Region III. The Women's Commission is also attempting to address its past lack of legislative initiative by drafting legislation. However, public policy positions which would clarify the Commission's direction and provide a focus for all legislative activity would be helpful. The Commission's website could be enhanced to provide additional information to women, and increasing the awareness of the website should be pursued. Furthermore, the Commission has not utilized the media effectively to publicize concerns, issues or legislative recommendations which would broadly inform the public and contribute to developing a more active role in advocating for change.

Recommendation 1:

The Women's Commission should continue to avoid unnecessary duplication by supporting projects that need the Commission's assistance. The Women's Commission should also continue the development of its legislative initiative.

Recommendation 2:

The Women's Commission should develop public policy positions to serve as a basis for all of its activities.

Recommendation 3:

The Women's Commission needs to continue increased utilization of new technology to maximize its impact, extend its limited resources, and involve a greater number of women in its activities.

Recommendation 4:

The Women's Commission needs to utilize the media more effectively to broadly inform the community about issues impacting women, and to advocate for change. The Commission's website should be enhanced to include more information, and increasing the awareness of the website should be pursued.

Issue 2: The West Virginia Women’s Commission Needs to Improve Its Compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

The West Virginia Women’s Commission is charged with establishing a regular meeting schedule, and shall meet no less than four times per year. The Chairperson, or Executive Director shall notify the public and the news media of a regular meeting by filing a notice of the meeting with the Secretary of State for publication in the state register according to procedural rule §98 CSR-1-3. All meetings are open to the public, except as provided in WVC §6-9A-4. In 2000, the Women’s Commission held six meetings.

Of the six meetings held in 2000, the Women’s Commission noticed only two meetings with the Secretary of State. This is a violation not only of Title 98, the West Virginia Women’s Commission Procedural Rule, but also of the Open Governmental Proceedings Act. West Virginia Code §6-9A-1, as amended, declares the purpose and intent of Article 9A. It states in part “...it is, therefore, in the best interests of the people of this state for the proceedings of all public agencies to be conducted openly...”.

The two meetings which were noticed were the first and third quarter meetings held in February and June 2000. The final Commission meeting, held in November, was held via conference telephone in order to accommodate the Commissioners who could not travel. The Director’s office in Charleston was equipped with a speaker telephone for visitors. Analysis of attendance at noticed meetings as opposed to non-noticed meetings does not suggest that there was any effect on attendance. During the year six guests attended Women’s Commission meetings. Of the noticed meetings, one had no guests, and the other had three guests. Of the four non-noticed meetings, one had one guest, one had two guests, and two had no guests (See Table 1).

Table 1		
Effect of Secretary of State Notices on Women’s Commission Guest Attendance		
Meetings	Noticed	Number of Guests
1Q00 Meeting (February 14, 2000)	Yes	0
2Q00 Business Meeting (April 15, 2000)	No	1
3Q00 Business Meeting (June 16, 2000)	Yes	3
Womens Commission Meeting (August 25, 2000)	No	2
Commission Planning Retreat (August 26, 2000)	No	0
4Q00 Meeting - Conference Call (November 8, 2000)	No	0
Totals	2	6

Since two of the six meetings were properly noticed and publicized by the Secretary of State, it is clear that the Women's Commission understands the mechanism for providing notice of its meetings. While the effect of inconsistent noticing did not appear to be significant, it is a violation of the procedural rule. Potentially, attendance could be adversely impacted by not providing notice of meetings.

Recommendation 5:

The West Virginia Women's Commission should improve its efforts to comply with the Open Meetings Governmental Proceedings Act.

APPENDIX A

Transmittal Letter to Agency

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE
Performance Evaluation and Research Division

Building 1, Room W-314
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0610
(304) 347-4890
(304) 347-4939 FAX



John Sylvia
Director

April 20, 2001

Paul L. Nusbaum, Cabinet Secretary
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
State Capitol Complex
Building 3, Room 206
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Secretary Nusbaum:

Enclosed is a draft copy of the Preliminary Performance Review of the West Virginia Women's Commission. John Sylvia and myself would like to meet with you, or your designated representative and Women's Commission Executive Director Joyce Stover in the Legislative Conference Room (W-314) on Friday, April 27 at 1:30 P.M. for an exit conference. At that time we can discuss any concerns you may have with the report.

I appreciate the assistance received from the staff of the Women's Commission in providing documents and other information in a timely manner. This greatly facilitated the performance review.

Sincerely,


Gail Higgins
Research Analyst

c: Joyce Stover, Executive Director
West Virginia Women's Commission

Joint Committee on Government and Finance

APPENDIX B
Agency Response



350 Capitol Street
Room 721
Charleston, WV 25301-3700

WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN'S COMMISSION

April 27, 2001

RECEIVED

APR 1 2001

**RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE
EVALUATION DIVISION**

Ms. Gail Higgins, Research Analyst
West Virginia Legislature
Performance Evaluation and Research Division
Building 1, Room W-314, Capitol Complex
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0610

Dear Ms. Higgins:

Thank you for the opportunity for Commissioner Elaine Harris, DHHR representative Shana Phares, and I to meet with you and John Sylvia today to review the draft of the Preliminary Performance Review (PERD) of the West Virginia Women's Commission. We appreciated the chance to discuss your findings and recommendations to the Commission.

I was pleased that most of the recommendations for improvement are things that of which we were aware, and which we have already begun steps to correct. We have a completely new staff since the last review (program manager November '99, secretary June '00, me July '98), so there has been a learning curve made more difficult due to no experienced employees in the office, or written procedures. We do have written procedure now.

Following the 1999 review, I went through Commission records to learn more about its history, particularly from 1995 through the 1999 evaluation. In order to ensure that history did not repeat itself, it was important for me to understand the problems encountered in the past. The 1999 report was clear: the Women's Commission did not answer the questions posed in the report, but focused on past accomplishments. It was also noted that we did not address the issue of what we intended to do differently in the future.

Since that time, the commissioners and staff have worked diligently to implement the Legislative Auditor's recommendations by carefully selecting organizations with which we work; improving our effectiveness through the use of technology; eliminating unnecessary or duplicative projects; and by developing a unique and more active role in advocating changes that have the potential to improve the quality of life for West Virginians.

I have some comments to make about the Preliminary Performance Review.

Forming coalitions in areas where the Women's Commission had previously not been actively involved. We are working closely with the Bureau for Public Health (BPH), not only in the bureau's Healthy People 2010 Objectives, but also in working with various divisions within BPH to expand not only our audience, but theirs as well. The combination of their resources and ours reaches wider audiences than either can alone, and allows us to reach a wider range of socioeconomic levels across the state.

In addition to serving on committees, the commission promotes in our newsletter events and program information that BPH and other state agencies are sponsoring for women and families. We encourage participation in all our events, from leading workshops to displaying information about their programs.

Commissioners and the staff of the Women's Commission actively support health initiatives for women. Women make up the majority of the state's population, and we also have the oldest population average in the U. S., a fact that will impact state women as we age. We want to make sure that the word is getting out to women and girls on the importance of preventative health care.

We have formed a coalition with the March of Dimes promoting the use of folic acid for girls and women to prevent birth defects and perhaps prevent heart disease in older women. We work with other groups, as well.

New Activities

- **Grant-writing workshops.** We have another workshop scheduled for September 7, 2001 in Parkersburg. We have gotten many requests for grant-writing information and places women can secure funding for their businesses, either to start them or expand them. There were 22,000 self-employed women in West Virginia in 1998, representing 36.1% of total self-employment in the state, and the number is growing. Economic issues, including equal pay, are high on our priority list. The Commission endorses the recommendation to the legislature from the Equal Pay Commission to adjust salaries of classified positions generally identified as women's jobs.
- **Science teleconference.** This satellite teleconference began with the suggestion from the Region III Department of Labor's (DOL) Women's Bureau to bus girls to a site where we could talk to them about the importance of girls considering careers in the areas of math, science, computer technology, and engineering.

Science teleconference (cont'd).

Afterward, we were to downlink to NASA to listen to women scientists talk about opportunities for women in science at NASA.

Busing girls from a school involves a lot of paperwork and insurance and limits the number of participants. West Virginia was the only state in Region III of the DOL with the capability of sharing information with not 50 or 100 girls—the maximum other commissions could accommodate—but over 1,100 participants. Every county within West Virginia had the capability to downlink this program. We had 18 of 55 counties join us, plus 3 libraries, a couple of senior citizens groups, and a group of community college students from Pennsylvania. In addition, we had 24 schools request tapes.

To make this satellite teleconference effective and appealing to middle and high school girls, we brought in four young women, an engineer, a computer programmer, an archeologist and a doctor who talked directly to students and teachers via an 800 number. In addition, we pre-taped six students asking questions of our panelists and inserted these questions into the panel discussion, which encouraged students to call in from across the state.

This satellite teleconference was useful to students in letting them talk to young women engaged in what are generally considered men's occupations, and it also provided a tool for teachers to evaluate their teaching methods and determine if they practiced gender fairness in the classroom.

The West Virginia Women's Commission is in contention for an Outstanding Achievement Award from the National Association of Commissions for Women for this event.

- **Boards and Commissions Talent Bank.** A project the Commission is working on that is not mentioned in the PERD review is establishment of a talent bank of qualified women who want to be considered for appointment to a board or commission, or for a gubernatorial appointment with state government. We plan to present these resumes to the governor and ask that he practice gender equity in his appointments. We do not want women appointed as a token gesture; therefore we are providing qualified applicants to consider when filling posts.

Recommendation #1

Continue avoiding duplication and continue the legislative initiative. After every event or meeting, we hold a “What Worked and What Didn’t” review to see how we can make the next one better and more effective. We will continue to look at programs and events to determine if they can be improved or if they have outlived their usefulness. We will work cooperatively with other state agencies in order to provide useful, educational service to the women of West Virginia, including the legislative agenda, which we anticipate being useful to our policymakers in creating and enforcing state laws.

Recommendation #2

Policy Positions. Establishing Commission policy positions is on the agenda for our July planning session. I have been working with the North Carolina Commission for Women to ascertain a good method to use in forming policy positions.

Recommendation #3

Increased utilization of new technology. The Commission agrees that using technology at multiple geographical locations should be pursued. We have discussed holding a town hall meeting using the media, possibly public television, where we could utilize an 800 number for call-ins. We are still trying to determine if this is a practical possibility.

Recommendation #4

Use the media more effectively. I have spoken with John Law, the new Communications Director for DHHR, who has agreed to assist the Commission in putting out not only more press releases relating to the Commission, but also informational releases containing data of importance to women and girls and advocacy issues. We have developed a very good working relationship with DHHR’s communication section and will continue to expand our work with them.

Recommendation #5

Comply with the Open Meetings Governmental Proceedings Act. We have no excuse for failure to notify the Secretary of State’s office of upcoming meetings. We had a miscommunication in the office that caused this to happen. Meeting dates are posted on a large calendar in the office and we have noted on that calendar to contact the Secretary of State’s Office ten days prior to the meetings. We emailed notice of our meetings to our mass email list prior to all meetings, but recognize that is insufficient. We apologize. It won’t happen again.

Ms. Gail Higgins
April 27, 2001
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Other:

The review correctly points out statistics on other states' women's commissions. With all due respect, I would like to comment on those comparisons.

It is true that Vermont initiated nine issue-oriented press releases during 1999-2000, but we are not comparing apples to apples here. With an annual budget of \$261,331, Vermont's commission has a policy coordinator with a salary of \$51,000 per year, whose job it is to monitor legislative issues pertaining to women, post that information on their website and get it to women's groups around the state.

The same is true for Connecticut. Their Permanent Commission on the Status of Women's annual budget is \$406,844/year. With eight full-time and two part-time employees, they provide many services to the women of Connecticut that we are unable to do with a budget almost one quarter of theirs, with a staff of three.

Michigan's Commission for Women is not currently active on the national level; hence I have no firsthand knowledge of their budget or staff, or of their activities.

I thank you again for your helpful recommendations and suggestions for ways to make our Women's Commission more effective and useful to the people of West Virginia. If you have questions, please call me at 558-0071, or email me at joycestover@wvdhhr.org.

Sincerely,



Joyce M. Stover
Executive Director

JMS:s

