



WVWC QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES 6-12-25

Members Present: Samantha Willis, Beth Wolfe

Members Absent: Belinda Biafore, Betty Critch, Leah Glover, Kenyatta Grant (Chair), Kameron Miller, Beth Redden, Michelle Barnes Russell, Sierra Sovine

Ex-Officio Members & Staff and Others Present: Rojen Embol (WVWC Staff), Katonya Hart (Regional Representative), Angelica Hightower (DHS Communications), Jill Upson (WVWC Staff), Executive Director Tia Welch (WVHRC)

Ex-Officio Members & Staff and Others Absent: Rae Bates (DHS), Candace Kraus (Attorney General's Office), Callie Saunders (Division of Labor), Angela Sundstrom (HEPC), Bobbie Wisniewski (DOP)

WV Women's Commission Executive Director, Jill Upson, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. After a silent roll call was taken, she ascertained that a quorum was not present and that the approval of the September 2024, December 2024 and March 2025 minutes, along with all other votes, would need to be carried over to the next meeting or until additional members joined the call.

Reports

Executive Director Upson reported that the budget provided by DHS showed an unchanged balance of \$42,275.65. Upson noted that there is still one unpaid vendor from the August 2024 Legacy of Women Awards for videography in the amount of \$600. She added that if he resolves the issues with his vendor registration in OASIS that she would finalize his payment but that the Auditor requires that this happen prior to final payment. Commissioner Beth Wolfe commended Director Upson for her financial management. Upson replied that it helps having the Commission housed in the HHOMA offices to save on expenses.

For Ex-Officio Reports, DoHS Staff, Angel Hightower reported that DoHS Cabinet Secretary Mayer had spoken with Deputy Secretary Mullins about getting in touch with Director Upson. She further stated that the Deputy Secretary indicated that she would like to be more engaged and present with the commissions. Director Upson replied that she would be sure to add Secretary Mullins to all WVWC communications.

For Committee Reports, Commissioner Wolfe reported that will be scheduling a meeting for the Education Committee that same day.

Ex-Officio member, Director Tia Welch joined the call and reported that the West Virginia Human Rights Commission is currently in the process of moving but that they are still doing outreach for EEOC over the summer.

Director Upson recognized Volunteer Katonya Hart and invited her to share committee meeting dates if she had them. Ms. Hart reported that she had not received any responses to her emails regarding potential meeting dates but also stated that she is working on a Doodle so that people can fill in their dates that they are available. Ms. Hart further suggested that the Women's Commission be represented with signage at the upcoming Juneteenth events. Director Upson stated that although Friday, June 20th is West Virginia Day and there would be no one available to staff the Juneteenth table, she would look through boxed items to find materials for the event.

Business

Opening up the agenda item for business, Director Upson informed attendees that she and Chair Kenyatta Grant had been in discussions regarding planning retreat dates and locations for approximately one year. She explained that the budget had been in flux for some time and that she and the Chair wanted to make sure that the WVWC budget would support a retreat. She further stated that she had previously sent a list of location and pricing options to the Chair while waiting for clarification from the incoming DoHS Secretary Alex Mayer. Upson offered the suggestion that the retreat take place in September to coincide with the next regularly scheduled quarterly meeting. Commissioner Wolfe asserted that it makes sense to align it with the quarterly meeting and also stated that it could be a one-day event where people would not have to stay overnight. Wolfe also suggested that the location be within a two to two-and-a-half hour drive for all commissioners and that the meeting be held between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. She added that she understands that would be a long day but that it would limit the amount of time that people would have to be away from work and it would cut down on costs by eliminating overnight lodging. Director Upson floated the idea of Morgantown being a central location. She also stated that she would need to inquire about the rules around travel reimbursements for commission members. Volunteer Hart asserted that, based on organizing groups that she is affiliated with, Buckhannon is the most centralized location for meeting in West Virginia. She further stated that there is a college and two hotels located there as well, adding the colleges have allowed nonprofit organizations to stay there and purchase affordable meal tickets to the cafeteria. Ex-Officio member, Welch asked what the retreat agenda must entail. Director Upson responded that it would be similar to quarterly meetings except details could be finalized such as the Student Ambassador Program, the Handbook, and Ready to Run. She added that placing everyone in a room together allows everyone to put their heads and hands toward the fine details needed to restart old initiatives that have fallen to the wayside. Welch offered to speak to Upson offline to consider repurposing WVHRC support for Juneteenth at the Capitol and Women's & Girls' Day.

Commissioner Wolfe mentioned that she has contacts at WV Wesleyan College and would reach out to them to inquire about meeting space, in-kind donations, and dining hall options. Member Welch asked if the retreat is restricted to the members or if outside people and interest groups would be invited. Director Upson stated that she would ask the chair if outside presenters were invited last time or if it was just for the members and ex-officio members. Commissioner Samantha Willis asserted that she can see value in both scenarios but that she sees greater value in getting all of the members into the room to get down in the weeds and talk about issues without outside people. She further added that a half and half version might serve well.

Moving to the topic of archives, Director Upson stated that she had gone through the fifteen (15) boxes that were delivered to her office and that information dates back to the mid 1980's. She added that she has spoken with Debra Basham of the West Virginia Department of Arts Culture and History (WVDACH) who explained that they would like anything that tells the story of the agency so she will work with Ms. Basham to transfer the relevant WVWC information. Commissioner Willis asked who owns WVWC information and what is the retention policy. Director Upson replied that this was an excellent question and one that she would take to Secretary Mayer at their upcoming meeting.

WVWC Strategic Planning

In the absence of the Chair, Director Upson moved to the topic of events and reported that she had invited Legacy of Women Award winner, Gina Milum to be the featured speaker at May's Talk & Tea but that she had done so late in the month and was not able to get her on the schedule during the month. She added that Ms. Milum did say yes to appearing as a guest and will be scheduled for the June Talk & Tea event on June 30th. Volunteer Hart expressed her excitement to hear from Ms. Milum and stated that she is currently working with her on a Women's Equality Day event.

On the topic of the Student Ambassador Program update, Director Upson shared a letter detailing information on the program that she located through an electronic files search. She noted that when the program was implemented in 2021, applications were due by September 13th of that year, adding that the next quarterly commission meeting for 2025 is scheduled for September 11th. She further stated that significant advanced planning would need to go into the next launch of the program considering that the commission only meets four (4) times per year. Upson also shared an electronic copy of the Student Ambassador Program Toolkit that provides additional details regarding the program. She offered to send copies of both to the full commission following the meeting. She also asserted that it would be helpful for everyone to have a copy of the toolkit in their hands to go over at the planning retreat. Commissioner Wolfe informed the group that the commission did, in fact, attempt to restart the program in 2021-22 but that there were zero dollars in the budget at that time. She added that now that the commission does have a modest budget available, she would like to work on moving the program forward.

Director Upson placed the topic of Ready to Run candidate training on the floor. She stated that the West Virginia Women's Commission members and ex-officio members would be outstanding candidates for public office and should consider running.

Scheduled Quarterly Meetings and Committee Meetings

Director Upson reminded the attendees that the next quarterly meeting will be held on September 11, 2025 and that she would continue to coordinate with the Chair on getting something on the calendar for the retreat to either work in conjunction with or in lieu of the September meeting. She added that December 11, 2025 would be the last meeting of the year. Lastly, she restated that committee chairs are working to schedule their meetings during these busy summer months. Upson asked if anyone had anything further on quarterly and committee meetings. Returning to the fifth item on the agenda, Volunteer Hart reported on the Economic Empowerment Committee, stating that they are working on a "Still Working 9 to 5" discussion panel. She

explained that this panel will discuss the 25 years since the movement to unionize office workers. Director Upson asked if there was a tentative date for the panel. Hart replied that it will be held in August.

New Business

To bring the commission up to date on the latest changes, Director Upson informed the attendees that her role at the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA) would be ending on June 30, 2025. She also stated that she has been working to schedule a meeting with incoming Secretary Mayer but was told that he is currently out for the week to relocate his family from South Dakota to West Virginia. She added that she plans to seek guidance from him about what his long-term plans are for the commission and to discuss a plan to find a new WVWC executive director once she transfers to a new agency. She stated that she plans to stay until a new director is chosen. Director Welch stated that Director Upson would be missed in the position of WVWC executive director and that she had done a lot and had navigated with finesse and grace. Ms. Hart inquired about the acronym DoHS. Director Upson explained that it was a result of the splitting of the former DHHR so that Department of Human Services (DoHS) is one agency and the other agency is Department of Health Commissioner Wolfe inquired about a video posted online and asked about the plan for a new executive director for HHOMA. Director Upson explained that both of the HHOMA staffers are still in place working and would continue to do so until the agency's funding is eliminated on June 30, 2025. Commissioner Wolfe expressed her disappointment in the current status of things and added that Director Upson has been wonderful to work with and get to know. She further asserted that she would like for the commissioners to be able to speak with Secretary Mayer regarding the future of the commission. Director Upson responded that she is on the same page as Commissioner Wolfe regarding speaking with the new Secretary of DoHS concerning the long-term plans and expectations for the commission.

Angel Hightower asserted that it would be best to contact L' Louise Fox to schedule a meeting with Secretary Mayer, stating that she is the assistant to Christina Mullins. Commissioner Willis shared that she agrees that Director Upson has done a phenomenal job and that she has enjoyed working with her both at the Governor's office and as a member of the Women's Commission. She also offered to step up and help in any way that she can during the period of transition and would also be willing to speak with Secretary Mayer about the path forward.

Adjournment

Director Upson called for any additional new business. She added that it has been an absolute pleasure to work with all of the members of the commission and thanked them for the work.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:52 a.m.