

NC Council for Women Quarterly Meeting Minutes
November 22, 2024, 10:00 am until 12:30 p.m.
By Zoom for Government

Members Present: Annette Taylor, Chair, Lyric Thompson, Vice-Chair, Liz Doherty, Candance Gingles, Erin Hill Hart, Chavi Koneru, Fontella McKyer, Dr. Michelle Meggs, Dr. Patricia Parker, the Honorable Robin Robinson (joined late), Tara Romano, Dawn Rookey, and Kate Woodbury (joined late) attended virtually via ZoomGov.

Members Absent: Maggie Barlow, Alison Kiser, Elizabeth Outten, Beth Posner, Adrienne Spinner, Carrie Stewart, and Pamela Young-Jacobs were unable to attend.

Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present: Jessica Benson, Jennifer Boedicker, K. Lenore Brown, Danielle Carman, Lori Gerber, Shagufta Hakeem, Eugena Harrington, Harriet Lunsford, Jean McBride, Lisa McLaughlin, Charnessa Ridley, Sandra Ross, Bernetta Thigpen, Deborah Torres, and Angela Winston-Hill joined remotely.

Guests Present: DOA Secretary Pam Cashwell, DOA Deputy Secretary David Elliott, DOA Policy Director Evin Grant, DOA Policy Analyst Gianna Quilici, DOA Legislative Liaison Wes Kyatt, DOT Deputy Secretary Ebony Pittman, and Carolina Women's Center staff Shelley Gist Kennedy, Heather Bucurel, and Shauna Harris joined remotely.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Taylor at 10:05 a.m.

Welcome: Chair Taylor welcomed everyone who was present and gave opening remarks and the ethics advisement.

Secretary Cashwell also shared welcoming remarks. She complimented the Council on the August 2024 Conference for Women and said she continues to hear attendees say what a wonderful event it was, including that it was well executed and had impressive speakers. Cashwell said she appreciates all of the work that went into it. Cashwell said she does not yet know the future of some leadership roles in Governor-elect Stein's new administration, and she thanked the Council members for all of their work in case she is not in attendance at the next meeting.

Carolina Women's Center staff Kennedy, Bucurel, and Harris introduced themselves. They said they attended the Conference for Women and want to support the Council's ongoing work. On behalf of DOT, Pittman thanked the Council for the work they are doing and said it is encouraging to know that the Council is pushing forward. She added that she is still getting positive feedback on the conference, and she thanked the Council for its work planning and coordinating the event.

Approval of Minutes: Thompson moved to approve the minutes of the September 20, 2024 meeting, and Koneru seconded the motion. All Council members who were present approved the motion.

Council for Women Reappointments & Oaths of Office

Judge Robinson administered the oath of office for reappointed member Hill Hart.

Debrief on State Legislative Landscape Post-Election

Kyatt said the General Assembly did not pass a bill adjusting the budget for the second year of the biennium and will not be doing so. He added that all of the other activity at the General Assembly has meant there have not been opportunities to talk about the good work the Council and CFWYI are doing. Kyatt said the 2023 Appropriations Act included recurring funding for two new human trafficking positions at CFWYI and for recurring increases in the Domestic Violence Center Fund and the Sexual Assault and Rape Crisis Center Fund.

Kyatt said North Carolina voters returned split government in the recent election and the General Assembly responded with a bill ([Senate Bill 382](#)) that would remove authority from the incoming Governor and other elected Democrats. Among other things, the bill would move the State Highway Patrol from the Department of Public Safety into a new cabinet-level agency with the Commander appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation through a joint legislative resolution, and move the State Board of Elections to the Office of State Auditor. He said there was no opportunity for debate or amendments in committee. Kyatt added that the election did not change the makeup of the General Assembly much, with Republicans losing one seat that would theoretically allow the Democrats to sustain a veto.

Thompson asked about the recent increases in funding for domestic violence and sexual assault providers. Carman said the 2023 Appropriations Act included a \$500,000 recurring increase for both the Domestic Violence Center Fund and the Sexual Assault Center Fund in fiscal year 2023-24 and another \$750,000 recurring increase for both in fiscal year 2024-25. Carman said those are significant increases, but they will not come close to closing the gap left by extreme reductions to federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding. Kyatt said legislators might be open to finding additional ways to mitigate those gaps. He added that final committee assignments for the long session have not yet been announced.

Report on Governor's Policy Initiatives and Gubernatorial Transition

Doherty said Governor Cooper is in Washington, DC this week leading a bipartisan delegation seeking approximately \$25 billion in federal funding for Hurricane Helene relief. She said OSBM has estimated that meeting storm-related needs will cost around \$53 billion. The request for federal funding takes into account the level of underfunding by the General Assembly, and includes money for things like transportation repairs, housing recovery, crop relief, and FEMA and SBA loans. She added that the administration's primary messaging at this point is that the General Assembly opted to spend large sums of taxpayer dollars on opportunity scholarships for private school vouchers rather than hurricane relief.

Doherty said the Governor announced bereavement leave for state employees in cabinet agencies in November, and employees are now eligible for up to 40 hours of paid leave following the loss of an immediate family member. She added that the policy applies retroactively so the leave can be used for the loss of a loved one due to Hurricane Helene. Doherty shared links to the following documents in the meeting chat: [NC governor creates bereavement leave for state employees | Raleigh News & Observer](#) and [Bereavement Leave FAQs | NC Office of Human Resources](#). Doherty also shared a link to the [Medicaid Expansion Dashboard | NC Medicaid](#). She noted that the expansion is going very well, with almost 600,000 new enrollees in the first year.

Doherty said she is very excited about the Governor-elect Stein transition that is coming in January, and Executive Branch agencies are busy preparing transition memos to ensure that the next administration has the necessary tools at its disposal to build on Governor Cooper's successes. She said it is a good time to suggest policy priorities for the incoming administration, and she would love to support the drafting of a transition document for the incoming administration to try to get the Council's priority issues on their radar early.

Romano asked if there is a good summary of Governor Cooper's policy successes to build on. She said there seems to be a general lack of imagination about the things that government can do to make people's lives better, and it would be nice to have a short summary to lift up and share. Doherty said the Governor's team is working on a comprehensive document of policy accomplishments that could aid the Council in drafting something. She added that MomsRising did an amazing job of lifting up the bereavement leave policy here: [North Carolina Moms, Families Thank Gov. Cooper for Expanding Paid Leave for State Employees to Cover Bereavement | MomsRising](#).

Report on Funds Expended and Remaining from Conference

Carman said she has not yet received the final accounting reconciliation for the conference from NC State's Office of Professional Development, but she believes there will be almost \$60,000 remaining in sponsorship funds. She said Secretary Cashwell and she sent a thank you letter to the sponsoring department secretaries and informed them that the Council hoped to utilize the remaining funds for another Status of Women report or series, and none of the secretaries objected. For context, Carman said the last four-part report series drafted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) cost \$100,000.

Thompson said she appreciates Cashwell's leadership in leveraging the remaining conference funding for additional reports, adding that the Governor's office has indicated that the reports are very helpful to their policy-making process. Thompson said she has three initial questions. First, Thompson asked whether the Council wants to continue doing smaller thematic reports and whether the last series focused on the correct issues and content. Thompson noted that the first time IWPR did a report for the Council, it covered all of the themes in one long report. In the most recent series, the Council elected to break the topics down into smaller themes and launch four separate reports on employment and earnings, health and wellness, political participation, and poverty and opportunity. Thompson said the Council added its own separate report on the impact of COVID that applied a more intersectional lens. She said she believes breaking up the reports into smaller chunks enabled the Council to target different constituencies based on the topic areas.

Second, Thompson asked whether the Council wants to contract with IWPR again or explore a different contractor. Thompson said the advantage of using IWPR is that they have a national template and the ability to do comparative state rankings, but it can be a rigid template that does not account for local nuances like the fact that North Carolina elects its judges. In addition, IWPR is not based in North Carolina and is not doing qualitative work in the state. So, it might be worth considering a partnership with a state-based university. Third, Thompson said she has questions about the procurement process and whether the Council will need to do any additional fundraising.

Robinson said the IWPR reports have been generally well done but they are a bit cookie cutter and they miss some purple state nuances. She said she is not sure if the Council should move forward with IWPR and the same basic four pillars or look to state-based researchers who will be more familiar with North Carolina. Woodbury encouraged the Council members to yield to Thompson's insights on IWPR but added that the notion of working with a North Carolina university is exciting. She said a university would have local North Carolina expertise and might be able to steer the Council to different general subject matter themes. Once the Council narrows down the subject matter, she said it might be worth breaking into smaller groups to

discuss what members want to see highlighted. Woodbury added that multiple individual launches of smaller reports create more opportunities for publicity.

Thompson said IWPR has gone through some institutional turmoil over the past few years, but she feels great about their current trajectory and leadership. She said she would love to have multiple bids from IWPR and local universities. Carman said she met with DOA's Purchasing Officer, Meredith Swartz, before the meeting to get a handle on the Council's procurement options, and it is her understanding that there are three basic paths:

1. CFWYI could issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) and seek competitive bids. Swartz' team would draft the RFP and would not need to involve the Purchase and Contract Division if the cost stays under \$100,000. However, that is a lengthy process and it would need to get started right away to ensure there is enough time to encumber the funds by the end of the current fiscal year.
2. CFWYI could write a justification seeking a waiver of competition for IWPR under [01 NCAC 05B .1401](#) on the ground that "a particular product or service is desired for educational, training, experimental, developmental or research work." As long as the total cost stays under \$100,000, Swartz' team would then draft a Request for Quotes (RFQ) for IWPR that specifies the deliverables and timelines. If the cost exceeds \$100,000, the Purchase and Contract Division would have to get involved.
3. CFWYI could enter into a MOU directly with a state college or university or another government entity. That would involve seeking a waiver of competition under [01 NCAC 05B .1401](#) on the ground that "the requirement is for an authorized cooperative project with another governmental unit." CFWYI would then have to work with DOA's General Counsel to draft the MOU with specific deliverables and timelines.

Cashwell said the second option would typically involve a pressing need or emergency or a sole source justification. Otherwise, it is generally better to go with the first option. Thompson said she texted someone at IWPR during the discussion and learned that they are still doing state-based status of women reports, but they have done some revamping of the format. She said the current ballpark rate would likely be under \$100,000 but it will depend on the details of what the Council is seeking.

Discussion of CFW Transition Memo

Thompson said it would behoove the Council to be part of the formal transition process. She said she expects to see regression on women's issues at the federal level and it will likely fall back on the states to make progress. She added that, under the normal transition process, the new Stein administration will probably not think about Boards and Commissions until the spring and she wants to put the issues the Council cares about in front of the transition team sooner. She noted that a number of the Council's champions are part of the transition team.

Taylor and Thompson said the Council would be moving into Committee breakouts, with the Education and Advocacy Committee talking about a transition memo. The Outreach and Partnerships Committee would be discussing ways to maximize the interest in partnerships stemming from the conference and exploring the possibility of creating more local women's commissions around the state.

Committee Breakouts: What's Next?

Breakout 1: Outreach & Partnerships Committee

Taylor chaired the Outreach and Partnerships Committee breakout session. Council members Gingles, McKyer, Meggs, Parker, and Robinson joined. CFWYI staff Brown, Ross, and Thigpen also attended, as well as guests Kennedy, Bucurel, and Harris.

Taylor asked the Committee members how the Council could do a better job of creating partnerships, including new opportunities that may have arisen from the 2024 conference. She also asked about interest in supporting the creation of new local women's commissions. The Committee members discussed ways to ensure they understand where such local groups are most needed, and Ross shared [a link to the known local commissions in the state](#). Robinson discussed the history of the New Hanover County Commission for Women and how it revitalized. She asked the staff to confirm that the local commissions on that list are still active. Taylor suggested hosting a meeting with county commissioners and municipal officials to learn more about local government needs. Meggs asked about the Council's access to data and ability to analyze data.

Breakout 2: Education & Advocacy Committee

Thompson chaired the Education and Advocacy Committee breakout session. Council members Doherty, Hill Hart, Koneru, Romano, and Woodbury joined. CFWYI staff Carman and Ridley also attended.

Thompson asked the Committee members for their input on a transition memo from the Council. Thompson and Doherty suggested including sections summarizing the four-part Status of Women in North Carolina report series and the 2024 Conference for Women, as well as the Council's research plans for 2025 and 2026, and then focusing on the Council's upcoming policy priorities and wish list. Thompson emphasized that the incoming Stein administration will be the primary audience. Doherty said the memo does not need to be long and suggested that timeliness is more important than perfection. Carman said she would start a shared document in the Council's Teams team.

The Committee members brainstormed the following content for the priorities section:

- Expanding on the Cooper administration's successes with paid leave for caregivers.
- Things that can be done through executive action to protect and expand access to reproductive care, including contraception, abortion, and fertility treatments; ways to combat misinformation and disinformation around those topics; and protecting the gains from Medicaid expansion.
- Ways to encourage increasing political participation by women at the state and local levels, and to engage with newly activated women around the state who want to take action locally or at the state level to advance gender equality.
- Enhancing support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence.
- Expanding economic opportunities for North Carolina's women.
- Supporting early childhood education and resources, including childcare.

Closing Comments

Everyone present returned to the main session. Taylor and Thompson summarized the discussions in the committee breakouts. Taylor suggested that both committees hold meetings before the Council's next quarterly meeting in March 2025.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12: 30 pm.

2025 Meeting Dates

March 21, June 20, September 5, and December 5, 2025. Carman will send Outlook calendar holds for those dates.