

## NC Council for Women Quarterly Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2024, 10:00 am until 11:30 pm

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**Members Present:** Annette Taylor, Chair, Lyric Thompson, Vice-Chair, Liz Doherty, Candance Gingles, Alison Kiser, Chavi Koneru, Fontella McKyer, Dr. Michelle Meggs, Dr. Patricia Parker (joined after roll call), Beth Posner, the Honorable Robin Robinson (joined after roll call), Tara Romano, Dawn Rookey (joined after roll call), and Kate Woodbury (joined after roll call) attended virtually via Zoom.

**Members Absent:** Incoming member Maggie Barlow and members Elizabeth Outten, Adrienne Spinner, Carrie Stewart, and Pamela Young-Jacobs were unable to attend.

**Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff and Interns Present:** Danielle Carman, Charnessa Ridley, Jessica Benson, Jennifer Boedicker, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Harriet Lunsford, Jean McBride, Lisa McLaughlin, Ikhlas Mohamed, Sandra Ross, Bernetta Thigpen, Deborah Torres, Deatrice Williams, Angela Winston-Hill, and Danielle Jeffery joined remotely.

**Guests Present:** DOA Deputy Secretary David Elliott, DOA Legislative Liaison Wes Kyatt, Governor Cooper's Deputy Policy Director and Senior Education Advisor Geoff Coltrane, and guest Dr. Laura Kuizin joined remotely.

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**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.

Approval of Minutes: Kiser moved to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2023 meeting, and Posner seconded the motion. All Council members who were present at roll call approved the motion.

Oath of Office: The oath of office for newly appointed member Maggie Barlow was postponed until the May 2024 meeting.

### **Chair Report**

Taylor informed the Council that the Governor recently appointed Barlow to one of the vacant Council seats and noted that one additional vacancy remains. She thanked the staff for the thorough minutes and meeting materials, and she thanked Doherty for circulating the materials from her master's thesis. She encouraged any members who learn of events that might be of interest to the Council to share the announcements.

Carman stated that the Governor's Office of Public Engagement and Inclusion is planning some type of Women's History Month event at the Executive Mansion in March. Carman said their Director, Tracy Lovett,

had previously asked if the Council was interested in partnering with them. Carman said she emailed Lovett a few weeks ago and reiterated the Council's interest in working on it with them, and Lovett said she would be back in touch closer to the event to seek input on invitees and the event program.

### **Update on 2024 Conference for Women**

Taylor stated that the Conference Planning Committee held its first meeting on February 5<sup>th</sup>, and that it is a great group of Council members and representatives from other state agencies that have pledged financial support for the conference. She said the committee will hold its next meeting on February 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 am and, moving forward, has scheduled recurring meetings for every other Monday at that time.

Taylor said the Council is moving forward with reserving the McKimmon Center at NC State University for the event. One challenge has been determining whether to cap attendance at 450 people as previously discussed, or to reserve the entire Center so that the attendance capacity could increase to 720. Taylor said Council and staff leadership have decided to go with the larger size and to rent the full McKimmon Center for August 28, 2024. She added that Carman will address budget issues and event management services later in the meeting. Taylor said the Planning Committee started a spreadsheet for organizations and individuals that should be on the invitation list, and a link to that spreadsheet had been shared with the full Council. The event will be a full-day conference focused on women's policy issues.

Doherty sought clarity on the various committees and their roles. Taylor said the Outreach and Partnerships Committee was originally tasked with event logistics, but that function has now been moved to the Planning Committee that includes representatives of the various contributing state agencies. The Outreach and Partnerships Committee will be holding off on an active meeting schedule until after the conference. The Education and Advocacy Committee is still planning to work on conference content and presenters. Doherty asked to be added to the Conference Planning Committee.

Carman shared a Conference Master Planning Document and explained that her intent is to keep updating that document as decisions are made so there is one central place to access information about the event. She said that document, in turn, contains links to the current concept note for the conference, a draft planning timeline, all meeting minutes that contain discussions about conference planning, a rough budget for the event, and the invitation list spreadsheet.

With respect to the budget, Carman said the largest ticket items will be food and drink for 720 in-person attendees, the McKimmon Center, and NC State's Office of Professional Development (OPD), which will be providing event management services on an hourly basis. Carman noted that the total event budget at this point is still rough and will change if we add more event management services from OPD. At this point, external agencies (including Commerce, Adult Corrections, Transportation, Health and Human Services, and Natural and Cultural Resources) and Administration/CFWYI have pledged a total amount that leaves a modest unmet gap in funding.

Carman said it remains an open question whether the group will seek corporate sponsorships to cover the remaining funds needed or pursue philanthropic contributions. Carman said, if the Council solicits corporate sponsorships, it cannot use the Governor's name because of the potential ethical issues that might raise. It is not clear whether the Governor's office would agree to have the conference bear his name if no corporate sponsorships are solicited. Regardless, Carman said the Governor's team is fully supportive and committed to partnering with the Council on the event.

Carman said there have been some discussions about providing a childcare option at the conference but there are serious liability concerns about that. Carman said Elliott had a very creative suggestion of trying to

identify a foundation that would be interested in providing vouchers or reimbursement for people who need childcare to attend.

Kiser returned to the discussion about corporate sponsorships, and said there may also be nonprofits that work on women's issues that are interested in being sponsors. She said those would be the same organizations that are being compiled on the invitation list. Thompson agreed that would be a good alternative. Thompson said one of the outstanding questions for her is whether the Council should look to corporate sponsors to cover the remaining budget gap, or whether there should be an initial round of outreach first to nonprofits that work on the same issues. She said her preference is to do the latter, and then to go back to the Governor's team and revisit the issue of using his name if the Council is able to close the funding gap in that manner. Taylor agreed, and said some corporate sponsors might have concerns about some of the policy discussions the Council wants to see happen at the conference. Gingles said her preference would be to keep the Governor's name associated with the conference, and corporate sponsorships may not mesh well with that approach or with some of the topics the Council wants on the agenda. Romano agreed and said there could be different levels of sponsorships available. She added that there might be national women's groups that are interested in sponsoring, as well as philanthropic funders like the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

Thompson returned to the topic of offering a childcare option, and said she really wanted to be able to offer one as a matter of opening up access to the conference. However, Thompson said there are concerns about potential liability and the amount of work involved, as well as the difficulty of creating appropriate programming for a wide range of ages. Thompson added that public schools will be in session by August 28<sup>th</sup>, so it would probably be a smaller cohort of younger children. Thompson said Elliott's suggestion is very creative, and the Council could pursue it if there is interest.

Parker said she agrees with Thompson about the importance of a women's conference offering some accommodations for childcare, and said there are organizations that provide onsite conference care. Taylor said the McKimmon Center seemed to discourage onsite childcare and, while there were some discussions about hosting parallel programming for children, that raised liability concerns. Kiser said she agrees it will be important to offer some childcare services, and she supports Elliott's creative suggestion if it is a solution to the liability concerns. Meggs said her organization offered some limited childcare options at a conference several years ago, and she would be supportive of a separate day-long event for children.

Taylor said she would defer to Thompson on assigning someone to research this issue. Carman said she does not believe a childcare option is going to be feasible outside of Elliott's creative suggestion. She said the liability concerns, as well as the administrative burden and expense, are too significant. In addition, Carman said she does not know how the Council would assess the demand for a childcare option without actually offering a service it does not yet know it can provide. Parker said she appreciates Carman's concerns, but the Council's role is to advise the Governor on how to remove barriers for women. She said women serve as primary caretakers, so providing childcare is an important goal for her.

Thompson asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to work more on this issue, including exploring options with foundations and the McKimmon Center. She said the Planning Committee has its hands full with content and logistics, and this issue is going to need a task owner. Parker volunteered to explore whether childcare is really not an option at the McKimmon Center. Carman said she did not hear the McKimmon Center team say childcare is not an option. What she heard them say is that any event that includes minors will have to go through a dedicated campus office and there would be a lot of red tape; in addition, any event on campus for children would require educational programming. As a result, Carman said she believes childcare at the McKimmon Center would be too administratively difficult and expensive, and the

lawyers within DOA are all very concerned about the liability associated with us providing direct childcare services. Carman said the beauty of Elliott's suggestion is that it would get DOA out of the middle of deciding how to provide childcare and allow parents to be made whole after making their own decisions about who cares for their kids.

Posner said, setting aside the logistical nightmare of providing a childcare option, she thinks it raises serious liability concerns and would be very expensive because it would require things like criminal background checks of everyone involved. She added that Elliott's suggestion about arranging for grants for childcare would send a very strong message that the Council cares about this issue and is going above and beyond to address it. Posner said there are a number of drop-in childcare centers run by women in the Raleigh area that the Council could also try to engage for a group discount. Outside of those possibilities, she believes the liability concerns are staggering. Doherty said arranging for foundation grants for childcare would also lend itself nicely to some press coverage for the Council and the Governor's office, and she would be happy to try to get some coverage. Posner and Kiser agreed. Via the meeting chat, Elliott suggested some alternative names for childcare vouchers, such as FutureGenerationsGrants, ChildCareAssists, and FamilyCareGrants.

### **Report from the Governor's Office**

Coltrane said the Governor has declared 2024 as the year of public schools and has been visiting public schools across the state to share that message. He shared links in the chat to the 2024 Year of Public Schools [announcement](#) and to the Governor's [remarks](#). Coltrane also shared a number of statistics about public schools and teachers in North Carolina. He said the state has defined itself by the strength of its public education system for more than 150 years, but there has been an under-investment in public education for years now and teachers are under attack about what they teach.

Coltrane said the current state budget includes an expansion of a radical voucher program that is threatening public school funding. The state is now 48<sup>th</sup> in the country in spending on public schools and lags far behind other states on teacher pay. But even wealthy people can now get public dollars to subsidize tuition costs at private schools that are completely unregulated and unaccountable. Coltrane said North Carolina simply cannot continue to be first in business if it is last in education.

Coltrane said the Governor is going around the state trying to elevate these issues, and he is advocating for four things: 1) telling stories about the great things happening in public schools; 2) imposing a moratorium on the expansion of private school vouchers until the state fully funds its public schools; 3) paying teachers what they are worth; and 4) expanding access to quality child care and early childhood education. Coltrane urged the Council members to be vocal about these issues in their communities and to share any suggestions they have about places the Governor should visit.

Coltrane said Medicaid expansion continues to go very well, and noted that NCDHHS is updating its [dashboard](#) monthly with statistics. For instance, since Medicaid expansion went into effect in December 2023, there have been more than 350,000 new enrollees, as well as 265,000 prescriptions filled for those new enrollees and more than \$4.8 million in dental claims. He said the largest number of new enrollees have been from rural counties.

Coltrane said the Governor recently signed [Executive Order 303](#) creating a whole government approach to reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals. The Order creates a new reentry council to identify ways for government to support reentry and strengthen prison education to prepare incarcerated people to reenter the workforce upon their release. It also creates a partnership with a broader national initiative to build support for reentry.

Coltrane added that Planned Parenthood gave Governor Cooper a Champion of Choice award yesterday for his work supporting women’s reproductive rights in the state, and that NCDHHS and Commerce are partnering to hire a new childcare business liaison position. Taylor said the Council appreciates the Governor’s strong commitment to these issues, adding that they are the types of issues the Council wants to address at the conference.

Rookey said she is a high school principal and career educator. She said, in addition to addressing teacher pay and a moratorium on vouchers, North Carolina needs to provide more mental health support in schools. Robinson shared that she learned yesterday that [Parker received the 2023 Thomas Jefferson award](#), which honors a UNC faculty member who has best exemplified Jefferson’s ideals of democracy, public service, and the pursuit of knowledge. All Council members congratulated Parker.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.