

NC Council for Women Quarterly Meeting Minutes

May 3, 2024, 10:00 am until 12:30 pm

Members Present: Annette Taylor, Chair, Maggie Barlow, Liz Doherty (joined after roll call), Candance Gingles, Erin Hill Hart, Alison Kiser, Chavi Koneru, Fontella McKyer, Dr. Michelle Meggs, Elizabeth Outten, the Honorable Robin Robinson, Tara Romano, Carrie Stewart, and Pamela Young-Jacobs (joined after roll call) attended virtually via Zoom.

Members Absent: Lyric Thompson, Vice-Chair, and members Dr. Patricia Parker, Beth Posner, Dawn Rookey, Adrienne Spinner, and Kate Woodbury were unable to attend.

Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present: Danielle Carman, Jessica Benson, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Harriet Lunsford, Jean McBride, Lisa McLaughlin, Ikhlas Mohamed, Sandra Ross, Barbara Smith, Deborah Torres, and Angela Winston-Hill joined remotely.

Guests Present: DOA Secretary Pam Cashwell, DOA Deputy Secretary David Elliott, DOA Communications Director Julia Hegele, DOA Legislative Liaison Wes Kyatt, and Governor Cooper's Policy Director Jess Englert 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 and Deputy Secretary Elliott also shared welcoming remarks. Everyone present introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes: Koneru moved to approve the minutes of the February 23, 2024 meeting, and Meggs seconded the motion. All Council members who were present at roll call approved the motion.

Oath of Office: Judge Robinson administered the oaths of office for newly appointed members Barlow and Hill Hart.

Chair Report

Taylor thanked all members who had completed their annual Statements of Economic Interest, and asked any members who did not meet the deadline to file theirs as soon as possible. Cashwell and Taylor shared a number of upcoming awareness days and months, including Missing and Murdered Indigenous People's Awareness Day on May 5th, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and national Women's Health Month. Koneru noted in the meeting chat that her organization is hosting a family-friendly Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebration in downtown Raleigh on May 18th.



Taylor recognized Meggs for the 2024 Women and Girl's Research Alliance Summit that her team hosted on April 17th in Charlotte. She said it was a well-orchestrated and engaging event. Meggs thanked Taylor for a phenomenal keynote address.

Report from Governor's Policy Team

Englert said the Governor released his proposed budget last week and the administration is casting it as a choice between investments that are desperately needed in education and childcare and continued tax giveaways and school vouchers for the wealthy. Englert said the state is facing a childcare funding cliff as a result of federal pandemic funding coming to an end, and nearly one third of North Carolina childcare centers are at risk of closing. Even with federal help, Englert said a lot of parents cannot afford childcare, and the Governor's budget includes early education funding and childcare stabilization grants to help parents and to keep educators in classrooms. She said pre-K education is in jeopardy and the state's investment per student has continued to decline. In response, the Governor's budget includes a lot of funding for public schools, including raises for teachers and school workers.

Englert said the first week of the short session has the Governor's team worried, noting that the Senate has already approved more taxpayer funding for school vouchers for wealthy people. Englert said the Governor is visiting schools and childcare centers every week raising the alarm, and she asked the Council members for their continued advocacy for public schools and early child education over the next few weeks. She noted that the Governor's office has a lot of talking points and materials that she can share with anyone who is interested in advocacy on these issues, and she posted a link to a [press release](#) on the topic in the meeting chat.

Robinson said starting teacher pay in North Carolina is very low, adding that the state used to be number one in education in the south. She said vouchers are fine but not at the expense of public education. Englert agreed, and said other southern states are raising teacher salaries more than North Carolina, which is now 46th in the nation for beginning teacher pay. Englert added that it is very disturbing to see the General Assembly prioritize vouchers for millionaires. She said the Governor believes that parents know what is best for their children, but millionaires are already putting their kids in private schools and do not need taxpayer dollars to do that.

Robinson asked whether it is fair to say that vouchers are not means based, and that private schools do not require teacher certification and can exclude people with special needs. Englert agreed, adding that the legislature is funneling money to private school vouchers without knowing if private schools are working because they do not have reporting requirements or accountability measures in place.

Cashwell said it came up in a hearing yesterday that vouchers do not actually provide choice to everyone because over 60% of public school kids get free or reduced lunches and ride buses to schools, but private schools are not required to provide lunches or busing for students. She said they also heard statistics on the number of counties that do not have any schools receiving opportunity scholarships, noting that all of the extra funding is to keep increasing the income cap to qualify. Englert said most people support parent choice but using taxpayer money for millionaires to send kids to unaccountable private schools is a different issue.

Update on August 28, 2024 Conference for Women

Taylor turned to the 2024 Conference for Women that the Council is planning for August 28, 2024 at The McKimmon Center in Raleigh. Taylor directed the Council members to the evolving draft agenda and gave a summary of the planned plenaries and breakouts. The theme for the day is the Status of Women in Tomorrow's NC, and the focus will be on policies that the current administration has advanced and a call to

action to continue the work for gender equity. The Planning Committee has been meeting biweekly on Mondays, and the Council's Education and Advocacy Committee has been working under Thompson's leadership to flesh out content.

Taylor said the conference will be able to accommodate up to 720 in-person attendees. Registration will open at 8:00 am for coffee and networking, followed by welcoming remarks at 9:00 am to set the stage for the day. Taylor said the overall goal is to bring the Council's status of women reports to life and to highlight areas where there is still work to be done. As a model, the session leads are striving to create panels for each session that include an agency lead/statewide leader, elected local official, and an advocate, although there will be some variation in that composition.

Carman clarified the roles of the interagency Planning Committee, the Council's Education and Advocacy Committee, and the individual session leads. She said the Planning Committee is comprised of representatives of all cabinet agencies that have contributed funds to the conference and that group is focused on budget and big picture items; the Education and Advocacy Committee is working on selecting topics and content across all sessions; and the individual Council member session leads are doing deep dives into the content and speakers for their individual assigned sessions. Carman added that the notes at the top of the draft agenda further define the roles of the session leads.

Carman asked the Council members to continue to populate the targeted invitee spreadsheet with the names and email addresses of people they think should be invited. She noted that the agency sponsors have each been given a dedicated number of seats for leadership and staff based on their level of financial support for the conference. She said, even though the conference is free to attend, there will be an early bird registration period for the targeted invitees, including agency designees, to have some time to register before the remaining seats are opened to the public. The public registration will close when the event has reached maximum capacity.

Carman said the staff worked with Council leadership to draft the content of a simple event website, which has been provided to the NC State Office of Professional Development, and is in the process of working with DOA staff to design a conference logo. She shared some potential logos with the group for feedback and said the event website should go live in late May, with the early bird registration process in early to mid-June. Carman added that there are still some open questions about whether to seek nonprofit and/or philanthropic sponsorships in addition to the funds committed by cabinet agencies. Doherty asked that all public facing conference materials, including the web page and registration site, specify that the conference date is on a Wednesday so people are aware that it is being held on a weekday.

Conference Session Lead Reports

The session leads gave reports on their progress to date with their assigned sessions:

- Taylor reported on the Economic Opportunity and Justice Plenary for which Thompson is the session lead.
- Doherty reported on the Political Participation and Civic Engagement Breakout for which she is the session lead with support from Barlow.
- Taylor reported on the Public Education Breakout for which she is the tentative session lead with support from Rookey and the Governor's policy team.
- Outten reported on the Gender-Based Violence Breakout and noted that she plans to consult with some members of the Domestic Violence Commission.
- Kiser and Romano reported on the Bodily Control and Reproductive Freedom Plenary for which they are session leads.

- Gingles reported on the Women’s Health and Aging Breakout for which she is session lead and suggested narrowing the focus of that session to aging.
- Doherty reported on the Gender and Climate Change Breakout for which she is session lead.
- McKyer reported on the World of Women’s Work Breakout for which she is session lead with support from Thompson.
- Spinner was not present to report on the Raising a Family Plenary for which she is session lead, but Taylor summarized her plans to date.

The group agreed that there needs to be a process for selecting presenters that guards against different session leads recruiting the same speakers for multiple panels, and they recognized that everyone needs to look beyond the usual suspects for speakers. Koneru and Robinson offered to support the Political Participation and Civic Engagement session. Taylor said the Council is waiting to see if the requested national speaker is available to give a closing keynote/call to action. She asked everyone to consider whether the Council should give some type of award during lunch and to share any suggestions they may have.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12: 18 pm.