

N.C Council for Women Quarterly Meeting Minutes
September 8, 2023, 10:00 am until 12:30 pm

Members Present: Lyric Thompson, Vice-Chair, Liz Doherty, Candance Gingles, Chavi Koneru, Fontella McKyer, Dr. Michelle Meggs, Elizabeth Outten (joined after roll call), Dr. Patricia Parker (joined after roll call), Beth Posner, Dr. Tracey Ray, the Honorable Robin Robinson (joined after roll call), Tara Romano, Dawn Rookey, Adrienne Spinner (joined after roll call), Carrie Stewart, and Karen Wallace-Meigs joined remotely by Webex.

Members Absent: Annette Taylor, Chair, Alison Kiser, Kate Woodbury, and Pamela Young-Jacobs were unable to attend.

Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present: Danielle Carman, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Harriet Lunsford, Lisa McLaughlin, Charnessa Ridley, Sandra Ross, Barbara Smith, Harriett Southerland, Deborah Torres, and Angela Winston-Hill joined remotely.

Guests Present: DOA Deputy Secretary David Elliott, DOA Communications Director Julia Hegele, DOA Legislative Liaison Wes Kyatt, DOA Policy and Program Coordinator Jordan Hanna, Governor's Policy Advisor Andrea DeSantis, and Virginia Clay joined remotely.

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Thompson at 10:00 a.m.

Welcome: Vice-Chair Thompson welcomed everyone who was present and gave opening remarks. She also gave the ethics advisement and recited the Ethics Commission's findings of a potential conflict of interest for incoming Council member McKyer. McKyer and Rookey introduced themselves to the other Council members.

Approval of Minutes: Koneru moved to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2023 and May 19, 2023 meetings, and Meggs seconded. All Council members who were present at roll call approved the motion.

Oaths of Office: Judge Robinson administered oaths of office for reappointed members Doherty, Koneru, Posner, Stewart, and Thompson, and for newly appointed Council members McKyer and Rookey. Oaths for reappointed members Kiser, Taylor, and Woodbury were postponed until the next quarterly meeting.

Outreach and Partnerships Committee Report

Wallace-Meigs said the Committee's primary goal for the coming months is to plan for a potential one-day statewide Governor's Conference for Women, likely in March 2024 in honor of Women's History Month, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Public Engagement and Inclusion (OPEI). She said the Committee discussed Raleigh and Greensboro as two potential locations, and identified a list of March holidays and



other conflicts to avoid. She noted that the Committee recognized that the date may need to be pushed later in 2024. Wallace-Meigs said the Committee discussed a number of potential topics, and also considered including awards. She added that she has an opportunity to write an OpEd for Carolina Public Press and has asked the staff to pass along any data they have on issues impacting women over the age of 60 or 65.

Meggs said she was unable to attend the Committee meeting, but wanted to share that her office is working on a Women's Summit in Charlotte that is already scheduled for March 22, 2024 and that might present an opportunity for collaboration. She said they have secured a location (UNC Charlotte Marriott Hotel and Conference Center) and expect to have about 300 attendees. The topic will be women's economic mobility and entrepreneurship, as well as ensuring that women and girls make space for self-care so they can thrive. Wallace-Meigs said that is the same approximate number of attendees that the Committee discussed for a statewide convening, adding that it would be nice not to be in competition with another women's conference. She noted that the Committee does want to follow the lead of the Governor's office in terms of content.

Thompson said she loves the Charlotte conference's planned focus on thriving, and the Council should add March 22, 2024 to the list of dates to avoid for a statewide convening. Thompson asked about the extent to which the Council would have latitude to incorporate other topics that were part of the Status of Women report series if they decide to have a direct collaboration with Meggs' team for the Charlotte conference. Meggs said she would be open to that. Thompson said another option may be to have a series of convenings with the Charlotte conference as an anchor. Thompson asked Meggs if she could provide a written concept paper for the Charlotte convening, and Meggs said she would ask the Program Committee for that and send it to Thompson.

Thompson asked Carman to summarize their preliminary meeting with the Governor's team about a potential convening. Carman said the meeting included Taylor, Thompson, and her for the Council. The Governor's team was represented by Jess Englert, Policy Director, Andrea DeSantis, Policy Advisor, and Tracy Lovett, OPEI Director. Carman said the group discussed a collaboration between the Council and the Governor's team to plan a conference during March 2024, the last Women's History Month for the Cooper administration. Taylor and Thompson shared that a convening would be an opportunity for the Governor to recap his accomplishments for women and families, particularly those that were in partnership with the Council. It would also be an opportunity to create and enhance partnerships with other aligned groups and to set the table for the future through a call to action to continue advocating for the Governor's and Council's priorities for women and families. Finally, Carman said Thompson shared that it would be an opportunity to highlight the key findings and recommendations in the Status of Women in NC reports before an audience that might help with funding to continue that type of thought leadership and report publication after the Governor's term ends.

Carman said the Governor's staff was supportive and excited about the possibility, and Englert asked us to sketch out the idea in writing so she could more easily pitch it to the rest of the team. Carman said Englert also asked for the writeup to include basic budget items, including "must haves" and "nice to haves." She said it was not entirely clear who would handle logistics, but the OPEI Director appeared to be willing to have her office take on much of the logistical workload.

Carman said the group also discussed funding, and the Governor's office clarified that they do not have direct access to funding for convenings. However, they thought that DOA and other cabinet agencies, including Commerce and Health and Human Services, might be willing and able to contribute. While the parameters of seeking corporate sponsorships are not clear to her, Carman said that also seemed to be an

acceptable way of generating some funding. Finally, the group discussed potential university partners that might be able to provide free or low-cost space or other in-kind contributions.

DeSantis said that was a good summary of the meeting and stressed that the Governor's team is excited and wants to be a supportive partner. She said she would be happy to be a point of contact for the Council and to help think through what the event could look like. Outten noted in the chat that the Department of Justice might also be able to provide funding. Hegele noted in the chat that the Department of Transportation just launched a WomenConnect group for their female employees and might be interested in being a sponsor.

Thompson said the Council representatives told the Governor's team that we would provide a concept note after this quarterly Council meeting, and thanked Carman for doing a first draft for the Council's review. Carman shared and reviewed the draft concept note that was included with the Council's meeting materials. Based on the suggestions and input to date, Carman suggested a topic of *Women's Economic Vitality in Tomorrow's NC*. She recognized that sounds a lot like the planned Charlotte convening described by Meggs. Carman said the draft memo listed a number of potential session topics, including the Governor's executive orders to date; North Carolina's successes and open challenges with women owned businesses; educating and upskilling/reskilling; the gender pay gap; affordable childcare; healthcare and Medicaid expansion; and others. Carman added that the draft document included a few suggestions for potential national keynote speakers; listed potential funding sources; and contained a first draft of a budget.

Posner stated that the proposed overarching topic of women's economic vitality might be too narrow and that the group really seems to be talking about the broader topic of the Status of Women in NC. Posner said she knows this should be a nonpartisan conference, but it might be possible to get a big-name national speaker like First Lady Jill Biden and someone from the North Carolina Department of Justice to speak about its efforts to combat violence against women. Posner asked whether North Carolina A&T might have space to host, or whether that would be too far to ensure the Governor's attendance. Posner added that we could look to local women-owned businesses for food and local women's groups might be willing to volunteer to provide childcare. Posner said she is excited about the Charlotte conference but thinks a separate Governor's Conference for Women is important. Finally, Posner added that, if a conference gets pushed to April 2024, Passover starts on April 22nd and would be another holiday to avoid. Koneru added in the chat that Easter will be observed on March 31, 2024.

Thompson agreed that the proposed title for the conference sounded overly narrow given the breadth of the topics covered by the four Status of Women in NC reports and the COVID-impact report. Outten said the Committee members talked about wanting to distinguish this conference from other women's conferences, and the group thought a more narrow topic might help accomplish that. Thompson noted that a lot of the Governor's Executive Orders that touch on gender equality skew toward economic issues. Thompson said the proposed economic vitality topic also sounds a lot like the Charlotte conference. Meggs agreed, and said one of their topics will be around Raj Chetty's research showing that people who are born in poverty in Charlotte generally stay in poverty. See [OI-CharlotteReport.pdf \(opportunityinsights.org\)](#).

Thompson said Secretary Cashwell suggested that the McKimmon Center at NC State University would be a great space for a statewide conference and would provide easy access for the Governor. Thompson suggested holding the broader statewide conference in April after the more focused Charlotte convening. She also suggested following up with the Governor's team about how to use the Governor's platform to amplify the Charlotte conference and a subsequent statewide conference based in Raleigh. Thompson said she reached out to the Director of the White House Gender Policy Council, who said she would be thrilled

to come to a statewide convening, but her schedule in March is very busy. Thompson added that, if the Council has to fundraise to cover the costs of a conference, they will likely need more time.

Wallace-Meigs said the original idea of a March conference was tied to Women's History Month, but fundraising is difficult right now and will be even harder in an election year. Carman said potential state agency sponsors will be less impacted by the upcoming election.

Education and Advocacy Committee Report

Thompson directed the Council members to minutes of the August 24, 2023 Education and Advocacy Committee meeting. She said the Committee members discussed their two objectives: 1) educating stakeholders/decision-makers, impacted communities/partners, allies, press, etc. about the status of NC women, and supporting them with information, resources, and tools for action; and 2) advocating with decisionmakers for policy change. Thompson said the first objective includes researching and messaging around the Governor's priority issues and empowering stakeholders to act. For the second objective, the group committed to a goal of providing three to five recommendations two to four times per year on potential executive policy actions, which could be the subject of the Committee's reports at the quarterly Council meetings.

Thompson said the Committee wants to focus its work over the last 16 months of the Governor's administration on providing data-based input and supporting his team in executive actions that advance the status of women in the state. She suggested that the conference might present an opportunity to announce another executive action or to highlight past ones. Thompson said she would like to see the conference have a thematic focus on all of the status of women report areas. She noted that the Governor's policy team affirmed that they have been helpful in crafting executive policy, which might help with raising funds for future reports. She added that the Committee will also think about potential educational and advocacy calls to action for the conference.

Report from Governor's Policy Team

DeSantis said her work as a Policy Advisor to the Governor is concentrated on education, workforce development, and reproductive justice. She also has a background in higher education research, and said she appreciates the Council's data-driven approach and welcomes their policy recommendations.

DeSantis said, in May 2023, the Governor declared a State of Emergency for Public Education as a result of pending legislation in the General Assembly that would defund public schools in favor of voucher systems. She said the Governor will be announcing \$8 million in one-time funding next week for pre-K child care; that funding will not address the looming shortfall but it will offer some short-term relief. DeSantis thanked the Council members for their support of Medicaid expansion and noted that the Governor is continuing to ask the General Assembly to decouple that effort from the budget.

DeSantis said the Governor vetoed a senate bill in August that included some concerning provisions about absentee ballots and an unreliable signature match provision, and that failed to properly fund elections. They anticipate a veto override vote in the coming weeks. DeSantis said, this summer, North Carolina was named the best state for business and that was due largely to the Governor's and Secretary Machel Sanders' leadership on economic development.

Thompson said there has been a gap in the Council's expertise without a K-12 educator, and she is pleased that Rookey has been appointed to bring that knowledge base to the work. Rookey said the move toward vouchers and the lack of teacher raises are making it very difficult to fill positions. She added that the parents' bill of rights and the attacks on libraries and what kids are reading have also been very

problematic. In addition, there is a real mental health crisis happening in the schools and a misallocation of funding to address it.

Rookey said it has been a very challenging first 10 days of the academic year at her school, including one student who overdosed and another who had to be committed after a suicide attempt. She said what is happening in her school is emblematic of the larger problem and it is very difficult to keep the spirits of students, teachers, and therapists lifted. She said she has never seen a mental health crisis like this in her 25 years as an educator. DeSantis said she would connect Rookey to the Governor's K12 education team after the meeting.

Thompson noted that the Governor has also prioritized childcare and pre-K, and asked about the depleting federal COVID funds for childcare stabilization grants. DeSantis said the state is looking at a \$300 million cliff in 2024 that the General Assembly has not addressed in either version of the budget. She added that Governor Cooper and several other Governors wrote to the Biden Administration and encouraged an extension of those federal funds.

Review of Draft 2024 Convening Proposal

Carman returned to the draft concept note about the statewide convening that was included with the Council's meeting materials. Thompson said the Department of Health and Human Services might be willing to cover the cost of some extra things like childcare. Koneru said she is familiar with some organizations that offer childcare at events and can look into that possibility. Koneru and Parker said they believe onsite childcare is a "must have" for a statewide convening.

The Council members tentatively agreed to the following changes to the draft proposal:

1. The title of the convening should be expanded to broaden the focus.
2. The Council reached consensus that a central Raleigh location would be preferable to increase the chances that the Governor can attend. The staff should base the budget on an assumption of holding the convening at the McKimmon Center and having 300-400 attendees.
3. The Council should not charge registration fees for the conference.
4. Additional "must have" budget items include Spanish and Mandarin Chinese interpreters. Koneru said she might be able to secure interpretation equipment for free by borrowing it from the Town of Chapel Hill.
5. The budget should include honorariums for keynote and plenary speakers; the amount of honorariums could range from \$100 to \$250 for in-state speakers who are not government employees.
6. The budget should include some funding for signage, programs, and printed reports, but a QR code could be a more cost-effective way to provide materials.
7. The Council would like to provide some transportation options to and from the conference for people who could not otherwise provide their own, noting that DOT may be able to help with that.

Closing Remarks

Thompson said next steps include editing the concept paper and providing it to the Governor and other potential funding agencies to see if they are willing to contribute and how much. The Council will then be in a better position to determine whether a March 2024 timeline is feasible and to reach out to the Governor's team about his availability. Thompson noted that she would also follow up with the White House on the best timeframe for them.

Moving forward, Thompson said the Outreach and Partnerships Committee will take the lead on planning and structuring the convening, with the Education and Advocacy Committee helping to feed content ideas. Thompson said she would leave it to the Committee Chairs to schedule the next meetings.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.