



Office on the Economic Status of Women

Minutes OESW Advisory Committee December 16, 2014 Room 300S, State Office Building 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Members Present: Senator Melisa Franzen, Senator Carla Nelson, Representative Joyce Peppin, Representative Linda Slocum

The meeting began at 1:10 p.m. The members decided to proceed informally. No chair was elected; instead, Barbara Battiste, OESW Director, led an informal discussion.

Barbara Battiste welcomed committee members and members of the audience. She recognized audience members Nina Rothchild and Aviva Breen. Nina Rothchild was the first Director of OESW's precursor, the Council on the Economic Status of Women (CESW), from 1976-1983. Aviva Breen was Director of the next precursor of OESW, the Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women (LCESW), from 1983-2001.

Duties of the OESW Advisory Committee: Ms. Battiste described the duties of the OESW Advisory Committee, as listed in [the September 10, 1024 resolution of the Legislative Coordinating Commission \(LCC\) establishing the committee](#). These duties are as follows:

- Attend OESW Advisory Committee meetings;
- Advise OESW on key issues and priorities;
- Provide suggestions and response to OESW on current and emerging issues that pertain to the economic status of women in Minnesota;
- Maintain an awareness of issues pertaining to the economic status of women in Minnesota.

Ms. Battiste explained that the Advisory Committee will expire on December 31, 2014. OESW will ask the LCC to re-establish the committee after January 1, 2015. Legislative leaders will then be asked to re-appoint members of the committee.

Overview of OESW: Ms. Battiste gave a brief overview of the history of CSEW/LCESW/OESW, referring to [Minnesota Statutes §3.303, Subd. 7](#). OESW was unstaffed and dormant from early 2011 until January of 2014.

Nina Rothchild, former Director of the Council on the Economic Status of Women, from its creation in 1976 until 1983, then spoke to the committee about the early history, significance and accomplishments of the office. When asked by committee members what women's economic issue she believes has made the least progress, Ms. Rothchild replied that the "unfinished business" is supporting women in balancing work and family responsibilities. Today's workplace is still set up

using the old model of the male breadwinner and the woman staying home.

Today's OESW: Ms. Battiste gave a summary of activities and accomplishments of OESW in 2014. She then listed what she would like the 2015 priorities of OESW to be:

- Bringing in the voices of Minnesota's women of color and immigrant women;
- Addressing the issue of student debt. Ms. Battiste explained that this is a "women's issue" because women make less than men; therefore, the "student debt burden" (the percent that student loan payments are of one's income) tends to be greater for women than men. Also, since student debt is not discharged by bankruptcy and social security can be garnished to repay student loans, student debt adds to the poverty status of many of Minnesota's older women—either debt they incurred for their long-past college education, or student loans they more recently co-signed or took out on their own to help children and grandchildren pay for college.
- Transportation. OESW's "listening sessions" this past summer throughout Greater Minnesota found transportation to be the main women's economic issue of concern in almost every region. The scarcity of public transit in Greater Minnesota and the difficulty of low-income individuals to afford a reliable car (and gas) affected the ability to accept jobs, to access job training and other education, to access child care, to have medical care, to use food shelves, to move to where there is affordable housing, even to take the GED test in order to qualify for various jobs.

Discussion by committee member of what they see as priority women's economic issues and the role of OESW:

- OESW is advised to engage the business community in discussions (including the 2015 Women's Economic Security Summit) of women's economic security and the workplace. In particular, reach out to private sector HR directors.
- What are the barriers to women obtaining/succeeding in non-traditional occupations?
- Are there ways to re-structure state government employment so that it is more family-friendly?
- It would be valuable to offer mentoring for young women students who come from families in poverty, and often are also the first generation in their families to attend college.
- Examine what other countries and states are doing to help women balance work and family.
- Would OESW develop and promote specific legislation? Ms. Battiste responded that OESW has done so in the past, but not since about 2005, and that in her first year (2014) she took the position that OESW would not advocate for, but would offer factual information on specific legislation. A suggestion was made by a member that the Advisory Committee could prioritize legislative issues and choose one or two for OESW to champion.

Audience comments: Linda Hopkins, Executive Board Member with TeamWomenMN, an organization focused on education and leadership skills of young women, commented that during WW II there was a federal requirement that certain factories have on-site childcare, so there is a precedent and model. Also, Best Buy has an on-site child care center. She mentioned a program in the Thomas-Snelling neighborhood providing mentoring for young women of color.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:15 p.m.