

2018-2019 Community Input Sessions

Report Summary

January 2019

Coordinating Committee: Black Women's Wealth Alliance, Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy, Gender Justice and Minnesota Women's Consortium

Background

In 2014, the MN Coalition for Women's Economic Security worked in partnership with community members and legislators to pass the Women's Economic Security Act¹ (WESA), the first of its kind in the nation to promote policies that support family caregiving and strengthen family economic security. As we enter the fifth year of WESA, members of the Coalition expressed interest in reviewing the legislation and identifying necessary next steps to ensure women have equal access to economic opportunity and sustainability. The current coordinating committee of the WESA Coalition include:

- Black Women's Wealth Alliance is a Black Woman owned Minnesota Public Benefit Corporation providing cultural wealth and financial education, skill building and social capital services to Historical Black Women.
- Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs illuminates gender-based disparities through research, teaching, and public engagement.
- Gender Justice is a nonprofit legal and policy advocacy organization devoted to addressing the causes and consequences of gender inequality, both locally and nationally.
- Minnesota Women's Consortium is a statewide nonprofit organization comprised of 100-member groups working to close gender-based disparities.

Initial conversations with original coalition members provided insight into where to start. Their reflections reveal that the process to reach the WESA priorities had not adequately included community perspectives, women of color, in particular. Furthermore, there hasn't been a comprehensive evaluation to determine the impact and effectiveness of WESA on women.

In addition to looking at WESA, the planning committee also explored Representative Moran's Women of Color Opportunities Act² (WOCOA) and advocating for a critical resource for WESA and WOCOA, the Office on the Economic Status of Women³ (OESW), which was defunded during the 2017 legislative session.

¹ www.mnwesa.org

² <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/dfl/pdf/030cfa5a-f088-42ff-86af-cdeec4c07e09.pdf>

³ <https://www.oesw.leg.mn/>

Process

It became clear that it was important to gather community input before moving forward with any legislative activity. The coordinating committee consists of smaller organizations and understanding our capacity, we began with input sessions in the metro area and in five cities around the state: Duluth, Brainerd, St. Cloud, Mankato and Rochester. In some cities, local organizations helped to coordinate and invite local leaders such as Life-Work Planning Center in Mankato, St. Cloud State University Women's Center and local branches of the American Association for University Women (AAUW).

Invitations were posted on MWC's social media outlets and bi-weekly newsletter. Nonprofit organizations in the cities of scheduled community input sessions received a personal invitation. And partners shared the invitation with their networks. Turnout at the community input sessions were lower than expected, however, those in attendance provided rich input and offered assistance in coordinating future input sessions in their region.

Summary of Community Input Sessions

Below is a summary of some key themes which emerged from the input sessions, in no particular order.

WESA and WOCOA:

Most attendees from the Twin Cities were familiar with WESA but did not feel they knew it well enough to provide input regarding its implementation and effectiveness. There was agreement that evaluating the impact of WESA would be necessary at this five-year mark, and more educational opportunities about it would be beneficial. Most had not heard of the WOCOA, but all agreed that it was critical that the disparities experienced by women of color and indigenous women needed to be addressed either with WESA or if separately, at the same importance of WESA.

OESW:

As for requesting funding to reinstate operations of OESW, it was a spectrum of those who were very familiar with it and some who were not aware of it, and then a significant number of attendees who knew of it but did not know it well enough to provide input into its reinstatement of funding. Yet, there was agreement that having an office at the state level which focused on research, legislative accountability and community engagement on issues impacting women is needed, especially during these times.

Other priorities:

Attendees came from various fields of expertise and levels of involvement in legislative policy. Some were interested in becoming more active while others were intently focused on specific topics and were looking for additional support and resources. Below are some of the topics which were discussed. There was consistent interest in a regular method to keep this information (and other efforts to advance women) together and keeping everyone informed on progress and action alerts.

- *Equal Rights Amendment (Twin Cities)*
 - The interest in making gender-based discrimination unconstitutional was high; it came up in several of the input sessions. There was also mention of and interest in the March

8th day at the Capitol. Attendees would like more information on attending as well as any opportunities to be involved with planning.

- *Gender Pay Gap and Women's Unpaid Work (Greater MN and Twin Cities)*
 - There is a need for resources to define and explain these. Some still misunderstand it while others don't sense the urgency of it. With the gender pay gap, the narrative has to always include women of color.
- *Paid Maternity Leave (Greater MN)*
 - The maternity leave available to mothers is inadequate and de-values the role of mothering in a child's early formative years.
 - A recent quote that had been making its way around social media is "Women are expected to work like they have no children and to raise children like they don't work."
- *Childcare (Greater MN)*
 - There is not adequate affordable childcare for families.
 - Minimize and/or remove the barriers that home-based childcare center face from state regulations
- *Domestic Violence (Greater MN and Twin Cities)*
 - Need to change the language to stop victimizing women and turn the responsibility on men.
 - Women fleeing domestic violence face a significant barrier related to transportation. In some parts of Greater Minnesota, services are spread apart and public transportation doesn't adequately help women get the support they need to leave an abusive situation including employment assistance, housing and health care.
 - Economics impacts domestic violence, approaches to address domestic violence must also include economic solutions.
 - There should be domestic violence courts in each county, similar to the one in Mille Lacs County, to adequately address legal case of domestic violence.
 - Reauthorization of Violence Against Women Act
- *Sex Trafficking (Greater MN)*
 - The decriminalizing of victims of sex trafficking and criminalizing of predators needs to happen so more victims willing to seek assistance.
 - Sex trafficking increases during peak tourist seasons for fishing and golf. This has been covered up but more needs to be done to better understand and address exploitation.
- *Housing (Greater MN)*
 - More women with children are needing shelter; traditionally it has been single men. Their needs are different and when there is chemical dependency or mental health issues involved, families are separated while mom gets treatment and children are placed in fostercare. Need to explore models for supportive housing to keep families together and reduce generations of poverty and addiction.
 - Incorporate trauma-healing approaches as trauma impacts ability to keep a job and housing
 - Evaluate criteria for affordable housing and low-income housing
- *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (Twin Cities)*
 - Creating a task force that would look at documenting and tracking the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in MN.

- *Environment*
 - The implications of mining in Southern Minnesota.
 - Understand and learn the water standards of Native communities. A resource would be American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) in Duluth.
 - Elimination of plastic bags
- *Comprehensive Sex Education (Greater MN)*
 - Accessible sex education is lacking for young people in our region. There needs to be an openness to providing this and to having young people participate.
- *Sexual Assault (Twin Cities)*
 - There is a benefit to providing trainings on consent.
 - Require consent education in high school.
- *Gender-based disparities (Greater MN and Twin Cities)*
 - The added cost of menstrual products can be a burden for families with more female children than male children. This is not considered with the cash assistance from the counties.
- *Comprehensive approach to ensuring women's rights (Greater MN)*
 - How can we be proactive with a comprehensive Women's Agenda that can encompass key areas that would trigger positive changes in other areas? Currently, we are on the defense as each topic is targeted.
- *Healthcare (Greater MN and Twin Cities)*
 - Health care coverage has become hard to afford for many.
 - Reproductive care and services need to be accessible and affordable to women and not determined by employers.
 - Mental illness needs to be talked about and adequate resources need to be funded and available.
- *Male socialization (Greater MN)*
 - We have to involve men in advocacy as well as changing the cultural standards for which men behave and value women.
- *Good government*
 - Transparency
 - Single issue bill instead of Omnibus bill at the 11th hour
 - Redistricting
 - Access to voting

Resources

WestCo Women of Color and Indigenous Women Table: a space for women of color to come together and share concerns, ideas, resources and support.

The MN X MN Conference will take place on Feb 24th at Harding High School. This is a civic engagement conference for Minnesotans. Registration is open at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybhoryw>.

The Sexual Violence Prevention Network (SVPN) is a network of people interested in or working in the field of sexual violence prevention. Anyone is welcome to join the SVPN E-News mailing list or attend SVPN meetings. More information at:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/svp/implement/network/index.cfm>

Savanna's Act is a centuries' overdue piece of legislation—the crisis of Native and indigenous women being murdered and abducted at sky-high rates and law enforcement failing to serve any semblance of justice is older than this nation. The bill is named after Savanna Greywind, a pregnant 22-year-old North Dakota woman and member of the Spirit Lake Nation who was brutally murdered in 2017. Savanna's Act was initially introduced in 2017 by Heitkamp, who quickly became a champion of the issue in the Senate but was blocked. It is planned to be re-introduced by Senator Murkowski of Alaska.

"Do Justice" briefings will take place Mondays from 10-11am on Room 300S of the State of the Building. This is a space for people of color and people of culture who are advocates and lobbyists to share updates, news, resources and tips. There is no call-in option as confidentiality and privacy is valued.

Supportive housing models to consider for families experiencing chemical and mental health: SAMSHA (<https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/affording-housing-models-recovery>)

National data on women from the Institute for Women's Policy Research: www.statusofwomendata.org

Tracking of federal legislation: American Association for University Women (<https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/public-policy/>)

Legislative updates: Indivisible Minnesota listserv <https://twitter.us15.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=92271d7822872d90ebf3be384&id=5316ab9eaa> and website <https://www.minnesotaindivisiblealliance.org/blog-1>

2019 legislative activities

Workplace Sexual Harassment: propose a bill to require education and training

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: Creating a task force to gather data and responses to this epidemic.

MN Displaced Homemaker Consortium: Request for appropriation will take place in 2019 as the current funding ends. There are only six organizations in this Consortium which is statewide which provides intensive pre-employment training and training access to nontraditional jobs. Coordinating the Consortium is the South Central WorkForce Council, which provides administration and oversight of workforce development in South Central Minnesota. (<http://www.workforcecouncil.org/>)

Consent Education Bill: Facebook/ConsentEdMN. Requiring consent education on grades 8-12.

March 8th: ERA Day at the Capitol. It will also be a celebration of women since it is also International Women's Day. (www.eramn.org)

FARM bill and its implications on families living in shelters (www.chumduluth.org)

Title IX: following proposed changes and its implications on sports and education

Eliminating the statute of limitations for the reports of sexual abuse (Break the Silence and Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment)

Increasing teachers of color in schools (Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment)

Increasing access to menstrual health (Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment)

From Rochester community member:

- 2020 Census: provide funding to ensure complete and accurate population count
- Create a nonpartisan task panel to draft a comprehensive redistricting plan
- Restoration of voting rights of individuals with past felony convictions when they are living with their communities
- Support reforms proposed by former Vice President Mondale and Former Governor Quie relative to the selection and retention of judges.
- Legislation that would require police agencies to adopt clear protocols on sexual assault cases, improve officer training and collect better data on investigations
- Legislation to allow "local option" so cities can choose to implement ranked choice voting.
- Improvement of legislative rules and practices to end the use of omnibus bills or late session rush and to ensure the legislature abides by the State's Constitution.
- Support provisions to close gender pay gap: prohibit using salary history in hiring, make salary ranges available, prohibit job tracking based on sex, require liable employer to pay additional penalties for multiple violations.

Next Steps

These community input sessions were another opportunity to hear from women in Minnesota. While there was an interest to explore a potential Women's Legislative Agenda, it may be more feasible to provide more capacity to listen, engage and elevate the work of many women leaders around the state. Therefore, based on the discussions, the next steps for the coordinating committee include exploring:

- A method to regularly share policy efforts related to issues impacting women, including tracking bills.
- Better understand the WESA implementation process to determine what is needed for an evaluation in terms of labor and cost.
- Better understand the process to secure funding for the Office on the Economic Status of Women.
- Communicate community input summaries with attendees.
- Create a way for attendees to stay connected.

The current coordinating committee has limited capacity but have dedicated some staff time for exploring a potential 2019 Women's Legislative Agenda. We are open to adding more partners and remain practical in our approach. We continue to determine action steps based on our capacity. Please contact Kabo Yang, Executive Director of Minnesota Women's Consortium at (651) 228-0338 or kabo@mnwomen.org to learn more about this coordination.