

INDIANA COMMISSION *for* women

Moving Indiana Women Forward

1963

In 1963, the President's Commission on the Status of Women issued a report which documented discrimination against women in virtually every area of American life. One of the recommendations in the report was that each state form a similar commission to research conditions and recommend changes.

1973

On January 23, 1973, Governor Otis R. Bowen enabled the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women (GCSW) in Indiana by signing Executive Order 3-73. In a letter to all agency heads, Governor Bowen cited his commitment to equal rights for women and all minority groups as his reasoning behind developing affirmative action strategies to integrate women and minorities into all aspects of life.

The commission was made up of an executive director from the Governor's office and fifteen commissioners appointed by the Governor. The Honorable Margret Robb, served as the first chair of the commission. There were seven different committees in the commission and a very small budget which was used mainly for staff and administration fees.

Although the GCSW was not in existence for a very long period of time, it was able to produce two very interesting events during its tenure. The first was the Intrastate Consortium of City Commissions of Women's Affairs, which was a conference in Indianapolis for all commission dealing with women's issues in the State of Indiana. The GCSW was the first to host this type of event in the entire nation. It was held on June 23, 1973, and produced a resolution from the commissions that urged the development of commissions around the state in order to further their work for the cause as well as the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The second was a series of events referred to as public hearing, in which the commission traveled all over the state to meet in different city halls and hear residents' accounts of discrimination, unfair treatment and restrictive official practices based on gender in employment, public service, education, and civil rights. The commission did not serve as judge or jury on the matters but produced reports to send to the State of Indiana. The program received an impressive response from state and local officials as well as media coverage. The public hearings were successful in raising women's awareness and even ameliorating some issues for Indiana women.

The GCSW was originally funded from the Governor's budget, but after several years the Governor requested that the responsibility of funding be switched to the legislature. Unfortunately, the legislature did not appropriate funds for the commission, and it was disbanded due to lack of staff and finances.

After the disbandment of Indiana's first Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, a number of groups worked toward having a permanent state commission which focused on women.

1992

The Advisory Committee on Sex Discrimination, the Gender Fairness Coalition, the National Association of Commissions for Women, the Indiana Women's History Association, the Indiana chapter of the National Organization for Women, the American Association of University Women and the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, to name a few, saw their efforts come to fruition on July 14, 1992, when Governor Evan Bayh signed Executive Order 92-15 establishing the Indiana Commission for Women as a unit of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission.

1996-1998

Effective July 1, 1996, the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) received enabling legislation making it a state entity by statute. Sponsored by 16 senators and 20 representatives, the legislation was co-authored by Senator Becky Skillman and Senator Vi Simpson and co-sponsored in the house by Representatives Susan Crosby and Sue Scholer.

Senate sponsors included Senators Skillman, Simpson, Wyss, Gard, Lubbers, Landske, Smith, Hellmann, Breaux, Bowser, Wolf, Rogers, Dempsey, Howard, Thompson and Meeks. House sponsors included Representatives Scholer, Crosby, V. Becker, Willing, Budak, Dickinson, Duncan, Engle, Goeglein, Hefley, Klinker, Lambert, Leuck, Morris, Pond, Richardson, Summers, Wilson, Womacks and Hayes.

The commission was established to be bi-partisan and to have six members appointed by the Governor, four members appointed by the Speaker of the House and four members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The commission was established to be comprised of 10 lay members and 4 legislators. This legislation

established the ICW's "special fund" which could accept gifts, contributions and funds donated to the commission. These non-reverting funds were designated for special projects of the commission.

From 1992-1998 the ICW operated as a unit of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) and received guidance and support staff from the ICRC executive director. The 1996 enabling left the ICW under the administrative umbrella of the ICRC but designated it as a separate state entity. On July 23, 1998, the ICW's first executive director, Dr. Janet White-Mountain, was named.

2002

In 2002, an amendment to the enabling legislation moved the ICW from the Indiana Civil Rights Commission to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

Memorable Quotations

*"The opportunity to work with Senator Skillman and other women Legislators on this important piece of legislation was truly an event in my life I will never forget. Hopefully through our efforts we have helped women throughout our State have an improved status and quality of life, and that the women who come after us will not have the same struggles. Our efforts just help underscore the fact that women can join together regardless of political biases, geography, religion, race and ethnicity and effect good public policy." - **The Honorable Susan Crosby (2007)***

*"We need your endorsement that issue such as pay equity, the abolishment of sex discrimination and sexual harassment, the creation of balance of work and family, the encouragement of self-sufficiency, access for all to education and vocational training, the means to maintain and achieve physical, mental and emotional health and most of all, the finding of satisfying life work is both the desire and the intent for all citizens in the State of Indiana." - **Melissa C. Martin, former Chair (1996)***

*"Thirteen years after the inception of the commission, the wage gap continues to limit the earning potential for women and their families. Hoosier women make 72 cents for every dollar that a man earns. Until women reach economic equity in our society, there will be a need for a commission for women." - **Senator Vi Simpson (2009)***

*"I had hoped that in my lifetime I would see women on a level playing field, it has not happened. I believe the ICW is successful, this year more than any, in getting remarkable women and their accomplishments in front of the entire state! I believe women tend to go out and 'get a job done,' with little acknowledgement or attention to the phenomenal things they are accomplishing. The ICW through the Torchbearer [awards], gives these women a rare opportunity to be recognized for their contributions." - **Janie Craig Chenault (2009)***