

November 8, 2007

Governor John Lynch
Office of the Governor
c/o Ms. Kathy Goode
State House
25 Capitol Street
Concord, NH 03301

To: The N.H. Executive Council
Cc: Governor John Lynch

Regarding the Appointment of Commissioners to the Commission on the Status of Men

We, the undersigned, would like to express our deep concern regarding the selection of appointees to the New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Men. Because the 2002 legislation creating the commission contained a 5 year sunset clause, the terms of all the commissioners expired in September 2007. So even though the commission was reauthorized last spring, all the commissioners are now up for reappointment. But in spite of the need to reappoint the commissioners, Governor Lynch has made no nominations as yet.

We see the Governor's delay as reason for serious concern because of the history of appointments to the commission since it was first established by the N.H. Legislature. In the immortal words of Yogi Berra, the Governor's delay seems like a case of "deja vu all over again"!

Relevant History

When the legislation establishing the commission was first passed in June of 2002, the legislature set a deadline of July 15 for then-Governor Jeanne Shaheen to submit her nominations to the Executive Council for consideration. When Gov. Shaheen had failed to make any nominations by mid-August, several N.H. citizens called her office to find out what was holding things up. Nicole Perry, one of the callers, reported that Gov. Shaheen's staffers seemed to find the idea of appointments to the Commission on the Status of Men humorous.

When Gov. Shaheen finally submitted her nominations in September of 2002, it became clear what had been going on. In spite of the fact that numerous highly qualified people had submitted applications to be on the commission well before the July 15th deadline for the Governor to make the nominations, Governor Shaheen had spent a month-and-a-half after the deadline canvassing the state for nominees who were ignorant of or indifferent to the issues the new Commission was supposed to address. At least one her nominees was openly hostile to the very existence of the commission. The preceding spring, nominee Scott Hampton had argued on N.H. Public Radio that a Commission on the Status of Men was no more needed than a Commission on the Status of Rich White People.

Because of this, the Executive Council rejected some of the nominees, and the Commission was unable to begin functioning until Governor Benson, successor to Gov. Shaheen, made the rest of the appointments.

Governor Lynch's Appointments Thus Far

The commissioners appointed thus far by Governor Lynch have shown no commitment to carrying out the duties of the commission as spelled out in its enabling legislation:

Section 19-I:4 Duties. --* The duties of the commission shall include, but not be limited to:

- I. Examining issues and effects of cultural biases and stereotyping beginning with childhood experiences and progress in public schools, and extending to include a study of male suicide and adult concerns such as family relations, promoting education, and policies which bring fathers and children closer together.
- II. Studying health problems unique to men or which predominantly affect men, and making appropriate recommendations.
- III. Promoting initiatives and programs that will enable men to develop career skills and continue their education so that they become productive and responsible citizens.

Among Governor Lynch's appointments are:

- Commissioner Gus Lerandean, appointed by Gov. Lynch in March 2005, seldom attends commission meetings. In 2007, he has attended only 4 of the 9 meetings between January and September 2007. When he does attend he often acts bored or falls asleep. He complains about lack of focus, but has not brought one single relevant agenda item forward to the Commission. Furthermore, Commissioner Lerandean has admitted lobbying against the reauthorization of the commission when the legislature was considering earlier this year whether or not to extend the commission's life.
- Commissioner David Lauren, appointed by Gov. Lynch in January 2006, has done little or nothing to fulfill the commission's mission of examining the harmful effects of cultural biases against males, studying health problems which predominantly affect men, or promoting programs that enable men to be productive, responsible citizens. He has instead demonstrated a pattern of blaming men without offering constructive ideas on how to improve men's well-being. He often seems to be more interested in disrupting commission meetings with petty arguments than working to fulfill the mission of the commission. At one meeting he excoriated a member of the public for sitting at the end of the commission table, in spite of the fact that the individual had been invited to sit there by the commission's chairman. In 2007, he has attended only 4 of the 9 meetings between January and September 2007. And Commissioner Lauren, like Commissioner Lerandean, lobbied against extending the commission's life when the legislature was considering whether to reauthorize it.

It should also be noted that Governor Lynch solicited applications from these individuals rather than appoint highly qualified individuals who had already submitted applications. One such example is Lee Newman, executive director of Stop Abuse for Everyone, and co-chair of the Greater Derry Domestic Violence Coordinating Council. Unlike the vast majority of domestic violence service providers who either deny assistance to male victims seeking help or offer them only the barest minimum assistance, Mr. Newman and his organization have, for many years, offered help and advocacy to victims of domestic violence, both women and men, without regard to the sex of the victim. Yet Mr. Newman was informed by Governor Lynch's staff that, rather than consider his application, the Governor had chosen to invite others to apply for a seat on the commission.

Commissioners Deserving of Reappointment

In contrast to the aforementioned appointments, the following commissioners have shown a deep commitment to carrying out the duties of the commission. They have demonstrated their willingness to listen closely and keep an open mind when N.H. citizens have appeared before the commission to discuss the issues of concern to them. They consistently attend Commission meetings.

- Commissioner Scott Garman writes the meeting minutes with a level of detail and accuracy rarely encountered in Secretary's reports. He regularly brings forward statistics and news articles directly relevant to all three areas of the Commission's mission, most particularly in the area of education. Commissioner Garman put in a great deal of extra effort, as well as contributing from his personal assets, to arrange to have Dr. Warren Farrell, a well-known author and speaker on gender issues, address the Commission and the public in September of this year. Commissioner Garman is regularly present at commission meetings. In 2007, he has attended all but one of the 9 meetings between January and September 2007.
- Commissioner Michael Geanoulis. Item I of Section 19-I:4 "Duties" states that the Commission should study "policies which bring fathers and children closer together." Commissioner Geanoulis has been a tireless advocate for the study of those policies. Of the statistical reports and news articles brought to the attention of the Commission that are directly relevant to all three areas of the Commission's duties, the vast majority have been found and submitted by Commissioner Geanoulis. He has also organized meetings to bring relevant guest speakers to the Commission, including John Stephen - DHHS Commissioner, Neil Bouton - Manager of Parenthood Programs for the NH Division of Child Support Services, and others. He regularly attends commission meetings. In one instance when a meeting was canceled due to snow, Commissioner Geanoulis drove in anyway because he was concerned that otherwise citizens expecting to attend the meeting would have no way of knowing that the meeting had been canceled. In 2007, he has attended all but one of the 9 meetings between January and September 2007.
- Commissioner Joseph Mastromarino has been a capable and committed chair of the commission. In addition to chairing the meetings, he manages inquiries from the public and media. In conjunction with New Hampshire's Chief Medical Examiner, he has been running a project to collect demographic data on suicides in the state. He regularly attends commission meetings. In 2007, he has attended every single meeting of the commission held to date.

As the only such commission anywhere in the nation, the importance of the New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Men reaches far beyond the borders of the Granite State. The following signatories from all across the nation request:

- that the Governor reappoint those commissioners who have demonstrated their commitment to carrying out the duties of the commission.
- that the Governor nominate people who are knowledgeable about and in full support of the Commission's mission as replacements for those commissioners who have demonstrated indifference to, lack of support for, or hostility to the commission's mission.
- that the Executive Council give especially careful consideration to nominations to the N.H. Commission on the Status of Men, in order to guarantee that all the Commissioners are knowledgeable about and in full support of the mission assigned to the commission by the legislature.

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