



**Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family
MINUTES OF MEETING**

March 15, 2011

10am State Capitol, Senate A Committee Room

I. CALL TO ORDER

Sharon Weston Broome called the meeting to order at 10:03AM

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called with the following results:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lisa Andry
Neil Bernard
Sharon Broome
Heather Doss
Peggy Gehbauer
David Helveston
Dale Hoffpaur (Gene Mills)
Michael Johnson
Daniel Kirk
Carla Roberts (Sen. Crowe)
Linda Ruffin (Paul Pastorek)
Fred Selby
Dorothy Wallis

MEMBERS ABSENT

Gordon Atwell
Penny Dastugue
Wayne DuBose
Frank Hoffman
Fred Lowery
Sue Morrill
Tony Perkins
Johnathon Perry
Tiffany Simpson
Katherine Spaht
Murphy Toerner

OTHERS PRESENT

Karen Champagne
Angela Aliff

III. BUSINESS CONSIDERED

Senator Sharon Broome stated that there were changes and subtractions on the Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family (LCMF). During roll call, 25 names were called and thirteen (13) members were present therefore, the Commission had a quorum at the meeting. The minutes from the Feb. 15, 2011 meeting were approved.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Sen. Broome asked for reports from the subcommittees.

Heather Doss and Co-Chair Michael Johnson met on the Pre and Post Marriage Initiatives.

Mr. Johnson reported that they have affirmative initiatives they would like to undertake as a subcommittee. The subcommittee spoke of the scope and magnitude of the problem with marriages and families breaking apart. The group researched best practices in other states and similar commissions around the country and found recommendations. Their work would begin with a finite, specific location for a pilot program to target a chosen area with initiatives available. They will gather statistics to share around the state.

The pilot program would be a healthy marriage initiative. Mr. Johnson suggested the Shreveport area which includes Bossier and Caddo Parishes. Dr. Fred Lowery who is on the commission, did some research there. In 2010, there were 668 marriage license applications and 676 divorce petitions filed in Bossier Parish. Mr. Johnson said they could start a program perhaps called the Caddo, Bossier Healthy Marriage Initiative. He suggested launching the effort with a marriage summit in early summer or fall where the subcommittee would bring together all stakeholders.

There are a number of faith, community and nonprofit organizations that are working around the edges of the problem but he said the committee can be a catalyst to go in and be a uniting force to bring all that together. The plan is to bring together community leaders, area legislators, mayors of Shreveport and Bossier, clergy members and international organizations such as Community Renew International, which is headquartered in Shreveport. Mr. Johnson said the plan is to pull together many components and stakeholders to launch this. There would be precise, specific objectives to present and promote. Among those objectives, would be to enhance or revive the community marriage policy that was enacted in Shreveport in 2004 or 2005. It has been largely dormant. In the past, clergy members got together from all denominations to commit to a basic set of principles. Groups would perform a required number of hours of premarital counseling before the clergy would agree to wed a new couple. In those churches, it could be suggested that they identify couples that could help train and provide resources so they could mentor. Couples in each congregation married seven years or longer, who are successful, would partner with the engaged couples or couples who may be in trouble. The idea is to get everyone recommitted to marriage education.

Mr. Johnson suggested getting clergy from all denominations to come up with a model sermon to speak on the subject. The subcommittee would volunteer their time and won't need a budget. Stakeholders will help. It is planned to do this for a short period of time and have statistics to show that this is something that could work.

Mr. Johnson spoke of a tax credit in this fiscal crisis that would be simple and symbolic. South Carolina allows a \$50 one time credit for going to premarital counseling. It can be done possibly for a couple of hundred dollars. Heather Doss commented she would like to see results from this commission. Since a coalition is already in existence in the Shreveport area, it would be a great place to start. She met with key business leaders in the Lafayette area who were on board with assisting in some effort. Ms. Doss said there is such a correlation between productivity and business. The support of the commission would not only help family units strengthen but help businesses as well.

Sen. Broome appreciated their work identifying some opportunity for couples. There will be opportunity to track information. Sen. Broome asked Michael Johnson about the community marriage policy program in Shreveport. She asked if it was more of a mentoring program. Mr. Johnson agreed. That program was established in Baton Rouge, Minden, Shreveport and Pineville. Clergy members

commit to not marry anyone without premarital counseling. They also agreed to create strong lasting marriages through the use of trained marriage mentor couples. Dr. Lowery in Bossier won't marry anyone unless it is a covenant marriage, Mr. Johnson said. The commission can reinvigorate that effort and draw new attention to it and draw new people to commit to that effort. There has been great success. National organizations are Marriage Savers and Smart Marriage.

Sen. Broome appreciated the groups' reports and thanked all the members of the commission for their faithfulness and commitment to help strengthen families in our state. She appreciates the labor towards this effort. Once all the reports are in, it's going to be advantageous to see how they fit together and can synchronize toward an effective strategy, she said.

Linda Ruffin spoke for the Family Issues Subcommittee. Chairperson, Audrey Pugh could not be present. Dorothy Wallis said there was other specific data they were going to pull. It is an ongoing work. A draft report was sent out last month but there is not a final report yet. Ms. Ruffin said the Commission asked them to look into what it would take to get marriage education courses into the school curriculum. The subcommittee is looking into that also.

Sen. Broome said at the last meeting they discussed the need of a statistician to work with that group since Ms. Pugh's department is losing a statistician. Ms. Pugh previously gave us statistics in correlation to the drop out rate and divorce rate in the top 5 parishes - Tensas, Morehouse, Franklin, Red River and Pointe Coupee. Sen. Broome spoke of Ms. Pugh's report of the low graduation rate where the birth mother is less than 15 years old versus where the mother is 15 to 19 years of age. She spoke on live births to unmarried mothers, marriages, divorces. Ms. Pugh had spoken on how those determinations can also be made by looking at other factors. Sen. Broome commented the data would lead to appropriate intervention and the information was insightful.

Daniel Kirk then spoke on the Public Media – Public Relations Subcommittee. His office wrote a federal grant and did research in terms of teen pregnancy and drop out rates. The Abstinence Education Office has that data available. Ms. Doss asked if there would be funds for a commission website. Mr. Kirk said he would look. Sen. Broome said there has to be a cost effective way if there would be a website since the commission is working without resources. It may be possible to integrate it to an existing state website.

Sen. Broome referred back to old business speaking of the report, Marriage and Family Wellness - Corporate America's Business that deals with the impact of marriage on business. This report was not generated by the commission but in partnership with Live Innovations in another area. It discussed building partnerships with business and faith based communities to broaden the base of stakeholders. Sen. Broome stated that would be vital if the Commission is going to implement an effective strategy.

Sen. Broome asked if anyone wanted to fill out a card and address the Commission.

Angela Aliff and Karen Champagne were in attendance and Ms. Aliff spoke saying they are from the New Orleans area and with the Tea Party. Her group formed a corporation called The People, LLC, because last session they noticed at many committee hearings that stakeholders were represented and had a place at the table. They felt people of Louisiana did not. They are trying in their own little way to fill that void, she said. She appreciated that the board was willing to hear their comments. They have many concerns, not just in relation to this commission but in relation to the growth of government in general. She did not agree with giving a tax credit. Ms. Aliff described herself as a staunch Christian conservative with great intentions. Ms. Aliff said it is intolerable that the state now has increased boards and commissions. She stated she did not agree with using the states' money to "force" the

people – tell them what they should do. She stated a crisis was created through incentives – welfare. Government is taking money away from the people and giving to the stakeholders, she said. It will never end. Ms. Aliff says she goes around the state to see that the constitution is being upheld. It's been this way for decades. Conservatives, especially faith based organizations, churches don't need public money. She does not agree with public/private partnership. She was disappointed Sen. Crowe was not in attendance. She had heard him speak of a Ponzi scheme and appreciated his comments. Ms. Aliff stated she is upset that the family forum is pushing the abstinence program. She said all the problems the state is having now was predicted. Rather than act to stop it, the state's position was, "If you can't beat them, join them." Ms. Aliff said that because a family is dependant on welfare, it would diminish their right as an American citizen. Her main concern is the growth of Government. She wants it to be limited or shrunk. Ms. Aliff said she is concerned with the boards and commissions.

Mr. Johnson responded that "forcing" is not the commission's aim. This commission would have no part of it. The aim is to encourage. This commission has its origin in the Foster Administration. Many states are aiming to restore and build up the family. There is no budget for the Commission. They volunteer and he stated he drove down to Baton Rouge from Shreveport at his own expense. There is no impact on the public fiscal budget. Mr. Johnson said, "Thousands are hacking at the branches, – one is hacking at the root." Mr. Johnson's aim is to encourage the churches' role for the family to do the right thing.

Ms. Aliff said tax credits are out of control. From Blanco to Jindal – Commissions have grown since 2007-2008. It is an over reach of government. The same initiatives are in place in other states. That's what is taking the country down she stated. She believes the cost to us is still there, and there is a long term cost – expanding programs in our homes. In the Child Code, she believes a parent's role is diminished.

Sen. Broome asked if there were any questions. She thanked all for their comments.

It was stated that Boards and Commissions have grown since last year from 491 to 495 now. Ms. Aliff thought the basic purpose is to create programs. Sen. Broome stated that it is not the purpose of this commission. She also stated she does not receive per diem as Senator Pro Tem.

Ms. Aliff thanked Sen. Broome for her time.

Sen. Broome said on the horizon is the Special Session. The regular legislative session will start April 25, 2011.

Sen. Broome asked for the subcommittees to continue with their research.

She will send an outline to pull all this together. She called on the subcommittees for a model for the outline.

Next meeting will take place at 10:00 am the second Tuesday, April 12, 2011.

In conclusion, during the last meeting it was stated that teleconferencing was not legally allowed to fulfill the need for a quorum. Sen. Broome will do further research or possibly introduce legislation to allow for it.

Ms. Doss asked since there was a quorum present, were there any objections to adopting the minutes for the January meeting. There were no objections so the January meeting minutes were adopted.

Sen. Broome will get the latest update of the number and names on the LCMF Commission. And she will get feedback from the subcommittees.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02AM.