

# Oklahoma Women's Coalition

ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



## COALITION ELECTS NEW CHAIR

The Oklahoma Women's Coalition presented a new slate of officers at its Annual Meeting and Issues Forum on Thurs., June 24 at Francis Tuttle Technology Center in Oklahoma City. The Coalition elected Donna Lawrence to serve as chair of the organization.

"Our coalition is an outstanding non-partisan organization comprised of talented people and groups from across Oklahoma. While we come from different parts of the state, we share the same passion -- to improve the potential of Oklahoma women and girls," said Lawrence.

Lawrence is one of the founders of the Coalition. The Oklahoma City resident has a diverse background and career. She has many years of experience in non-profit management and leadership, public relations and marketing, and executive coaching. The daughter of a former state legislator, she is passionate about public service.

"I have a deep concern regarding Oklahoma's ranking as the third worst state for women," explained Lawrence. "The Coalition is out to change that -- and we're doing it through education and advocacy."

The Oklahoma Women's Coalition was established in 2008 with Dr. Jean Warner serving as chair. Lawrence said Dr. Warner's leadership has helped guide the Coalition through these early critical years as the Coalition grew its membership to more than 350 individual members and 33 organizational members while focusing on key issues. Dr. Warner was presented with the Coalition's first Pioneer Woman Award at the annual meeting.

The membership elected the following to serve as Coalition officers:



**Chair -- Donna Lawrence, Oklahoma City**

**Vice Chair -- Karen Morgan, Tulsa**

**Secretary -- Carolyn Kusler, Broken Arrow**

**Treasurer -- Kathie Tanner, Stillwater**

Visit [www.oklahomawomenscoalition](http://www.oklahomawomenscoalition) for a complete list of the Coalition board members.

## Newsletter

July 2010

### A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

What a remarkable spring and summer for the Oklahoma Women's Coalition!

We followed Advocacy Day at the Capitol in March with the Solutions Initiative Summit on Incarceration of Oklahoma Women on April 30 and our Annual Meeting and Issues Forum on June 24. Each event was beautifully planned and executed, well attended, and hugely successful. The events helped the Coalition achieve its mission of improving the potential for women and girls in Oklahoma.

We've also enjoyed success on the bills and budget initiatives that the Coalition supported in the 2010 legislative session. Thank you for contacting our elected officials to let them know Oklahoma needs to reduce the rate at which we incarcerate women, needs to continue funding domestic violence and sexual assault programs, and needs to oppose discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace.

I am so grateful to all of the talented and dedicated women who have served on the Coalition's board of directors and working committees since the Coalition was founded less than two years ago. We have also been blessed with excellent staff support from Jan Loftis and Karen Hicks. And -- to every Coalition member, I want to say, "We couldn't have done it without your dues, donations and support. It has been a wonderful team effort!"

Now new officers and a new board of directors are taking over. Our wonderful Vice Chair, Donna Lawrence, is stepping in as Chair. Her board is composed of remarkably dedicated and gifted women. Expect great things from Donna and the whole board over the coming year! Let's each commit to serving the Coalition in some special way in the coming year. You'll be impacting the lives of Oklahoma's women and girls in important, positive ways.

Best regards,  
Jean Warner, Ph.D.

## Annual Meeting and Issues Forum: Highlight Successes and Encourage Advocacy

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The Oklahoma Women's Coalition held its Annual Meeting and Issues Forum on Thurs., June 24 at Francis Tuttle Technology Center in Oklahoma City. The Coalition shared highlights and accomplishments achieved in 2009-2010. Members focused on three major issues in the last legislative session: High rate of female incarceration, domestic violence funding, and discrimination against pregnant women.

"This year we gained experience and built relationships with Oklahoma legislators and other policymakers," explained Jan Peery, Advocacy Committee Chair. "We were able to successfully advocate for bills that would help all women and girls in the state."



The forum also included a session that involved educators and corrections officials. They helped connect the dots between education, poverty, and incarceration.

State Senator Susan Paddack participated in a panel discussion. She encouraged more women to run for a legislative seat. Only five women currently serve in the State Senate. She said even fewer will be in the Senate next session.

"We really want more women to participate in the process. Women bring a different perspective -- and we can help find solutions to problems," said Sen. Paddack.

Senator Paddack said that Oklahoma is next to the lowest in the nation for the number of women serving in the state legislature.

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## Coalition Successful on Priority Legislative Issues This Session

The Oklahoma Women's Coalition was successful on the legislative front this past session, with all three of its priority issues being signed into law.

Early in the process, the Coalition endorsed House Bill 2998 by Rep. Kris Steele-R, Shawnee, and Sen. Todd Lamb-R, Edmond. The bill, which allows non-violent female offenders who are mothers to receive community-based services instead of prison, was signed into law by Governor Brad Henry. The bill also encourages re-entry and diversion programs as opposed to jail time for nonviolent offenders who are the primary caregivers of minor children. After much negotiation, the program received \$200,000 of state funding toward implementation of those programs, with the possibility of matching funds to be sought from private sources.

## Representative Kris Steele to be honored Legislator of the Year

The Oklahoma Women's Coalition honored Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee and Speaker-designate for the Oklahoma House of Representatives, as the 2010 Legislator of the Year. The award was given at the Coalition's Annual Meeting and Issues Forum on Thurs., June 24. The organization is recognizing Rep. Steele for his leadership and efforts to reduce the high rate of female incarceration in the state.

"I am humbled by this special recognition," Rep. Steele said. "As policy-makers, we have the responsibility to work toward creating a better tomorrow for all Oklahomans. The Oklahoma Women's Coalition does a great job of advocating for the improved status of women and girls in our state, and it is an honor to join with them in this cause."

Representative Steele authored House Bill 2998 which allows the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to create pilot projects that include diversion and re-entry programs, support services, employment opportunities, and other resources for low risk, non-violent female offenders and their children.

"Oklahoma ranks first in the nation for the number of women incarcerated per capita," said Jean Warner, Ph.D., Chair of the Oklahoma Women's Coalition. "The Coalition made this issue a priority this year. We partnered with other organizations to examine this issue and look for solutions. Representative Steele has been a leader in moving this issue forward."

The number of Oklahoma women incarcerated is nearly twice that of the national average. The Coalition says that diversion programs can save the state money, approximately \$56 per day or \$20,000 annually per inmate.

"By implementing effective diversion and re-entry programs, we'll help stop the cycle of intergenerational incarceration and strengthen Oklahoma families," said Warner.

The Coalition also endorsed restoring the domestic violence fees that were lost due to a Supreme Court decision last year. In the last days of the legislative session, 85% of the fees were reauthorized by the legislature in a victims fund through the Attorney General's office.

A third issue was adopted mid-way through the legislative session and signed by Governor Henry on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Senate Bill 1814 by Sen. Brian Crain-R, Tulsa, and Rep. Dan Sullivan-R, Tulsa, prohibits employers from discriminating against an employee who is pregnant or affected by childbirth. The new law now conforms state law with current federal statutes.

As a young organization, early on the Coalition board agreed to move cautiously and slowly in its first year of legislative monitoring.

"We want to be deliberate in deciding which issues to adopt as our priorities as we grow and mature as an organization," said Jean Warner, Coalition Chair. "The Advocacy Committee, chaired by Jan Peery, will proceed cautiously, but aggressively on those issues we believe are critical to the future of women and girls in Oklahoma.

When the session began the first week of February, Coalition administrator, Jan Loftis, read every bill that was introduced and set up a legislative tracking list with over 60 bills noted as ones of potential interest to the Coalition. She then divided the lists by category for each of the Advocacy Committees subcommittee chairs to monitor and watch as the session progressed. The Advocacy Committee is comprised of five area focus groups: Education, Girls, Incarceration and Violence, Health Care and Aging, and Work and Family.

"The legislative session is a deadline-driven process," Loftis noted. "Bills have two to three weeks to advance out of committee, followed by another two to three weeks to advance off the floor of origin, and so on. As the session progresses, bills either die where they fail in the process or continue to advance to, ultimately, the Governor's desk for signature."

### [See Other Bills of Interest in Side Bar]

"What a great year it's been for the Coalition at the State Capitol this session," stated Peery. "We've taken small steps this year, but made a big impact for the future in the lives of women and girls in Oklahoma."

## COALITION SEEKS APPLICANTS FOR POSITION

The Oklahoma Women's Coalition seeks applications for the position of part-time Coalition Administrator. The Application deadline is **FRIDAY, JULY 9, 2010**.

See job description and more information at [oklahomawomenscoalition.org](http://oklahomawomenscoalition.org)

Send resume and inquires to Donna Lawrence, OWC Chair-Elect, email [donna@successredesign.com](mailto:donna@successredesign.com) or call (405) 476-3455

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to the Coalition today!

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### Other bills of interest that the Coalition monitored include:

**Senate Bill 1251**, by Sen. Jim Wilson-D, Tahlequah, and Rep. Mike Brown-D, Fort Gibson, prohibits insurance companies from considering domestic violence as a preexisting condition when deciding whether to issue or renew an insurance policy. Oklahoma is the 43<sup>rd</sup> state to pass such a law. The bill, which was signed into law by Governor Henry on June 6<sup>th</sup>, will help victims to come forward to disclose the truth of their injuries without fear of losing coverage for both themselves and their dependents.

**Senate Bill 956**, by Sen. Todd Lamb-R, Edmond, and Rep. Pam Peterson-R, Tulsa, was signed into law by Governor Henry on June 10<sup>th</sup>. The bill more clearly defines human trafficking and provides tougher punishment against those who make exploitation of human beings a criminal enterprise. The bill increases trafficking penalties when victims are 18 or younger to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$20,000. Previous law only enhanced the penalties when victims were 14 or younger. The new law also allows law enforcement to seize any vehicle associate with trafficking. Because Oklahoma is located at the center of three interstates, this legislation will help law enforcement in their efforts to deter human trafficking.