



Legislative Policy Collaborative Report, 2023

The Legislative Policy Collaborative of PYM had a year of transition. We are no longer a Collaborative but instead nine PYM appointees who serve on the General Committee (governing board) of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a national, nonpartisan Quaker organization that lobbies Congress and the administration to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

Change is sometimes difficult, and this one, which came as the result of a PYM policy implemented in 2022, was bittersweet for the Collaborative. The advocacy policy adopted last year states that groups under PYM's aegis may not participate in grassroots lobbying. That is what we have done as a Collaborative. To protect PYM, the nine representatives approved dissolving the Collaborative.

Dissolving the Legislative Policy Collaborative was not taken lightly. Prior to our decision, we participated with PYM leadership in several sessions around this issue, trying to find ways to fold the two ideas together. Although individual members of PYM may lobby under the umbrella of FCNL (as it maintains at 501©4 tax status), any use of PYM's data bases or means of communication (newsletters, announcements at monthly meetings, etc.) which encourages people to lobby for the particular outcome of legislation, can endanger PYM's 501©3 tax status. That is the legal advice given to PYM leadership. That put the Collaborative in a bind.

There was strong reaction amongst the members of the Collaborative about this desist order. We wrestled with it over many months. Earlier this Spring, a letter to PYM leadership explained our decision to lay down the Collaborative, clearly stating our concerns about the whole issue as it relates to Quaker activism. Nevertheless, as PYM appointed representatives to FCNL, we wish to remain in relationship to PYM.

As we enter this new phase, we thought it would be helpful to provide a summary of our recent past. Even through the pandemic, the Collaborative planned and implemented workshops for PYM (both in person and by Zoom) that addressed deeply felt concerns that many Friends carry. Amongst these have been immigration, gun violence, Middle East peace, over-incarceration, and one planned for last year – the intersection of racism and militarism. Each of these workshops culminated in a specific "ask" on legislation before Congress, encouraging our legislators to vote a certain way. Though we can lead workshops that are purely educational, we can no longer encourage this kind of direct lobbying. And so, we must find another way to

act on our leadings. We can no longer utilize our powerful resources to guide the leadings of PYM members to specific, strategically effective actions in the U.S. Congress.

As individuals and as a group, we can continue to encourage young Friends to join the 400 or more young people who attend FCNL's annual Spring Lobby Weekend to learn about an issue and how to visit with and discuss the issue with their senators and member of congress. We can talk about the exhilaration of 400 Friends from across the nation who go to Washington each November to attend FCNL's policy institute and General Committee, explaining they will have to go to the FCNL website for specific information. We are finding our way, but we are "back on our heels" right now.

In our recent letter to PYM leadership, we again asked that the Advocacy Policy come before the full body at Annual Sessions. We are not sure that will happen, but we are sure that the collective actions of Friends in advocating for peace and justice over the years, have been effective. We are really successful when we act respectfully, when we speak to that of the divine in each person in Congress, when we act out of faith, and when we know exactly what we want those in power to do. We hope to gather Friends again to bring needed change in the world we seek.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Oberfield and Sylvia Bronner, co-clerks of the FCNL appointees from PYM