

Quaker Voice *on Washington Public Policy*

www.quakervoicewa.org

PO Box 452, Olympia WA 98507-0452

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Metaphors for political decision making are all over the map (to start right out with one). Tug of war. Windows of opportunity. Pendulum swinging. Choose your favorite – or least favorite – one.

Well, the significant challenges coming at us in the 2024 legislative session call for alarming metaphors. Check out letsgowashington.com and get ready to work hard this session *not* to roll back recently enacted laws that have been among our key priorities. There is a well-funded movement afoot (or maybe armed?) to undo the Climate Commitment Act, repeal the capital gains tax, and likewise take the teeth out of (pull the rug out from under?) other Washington laws that have moved us toward the kind of state we want to live in.

Six deeply troubling initiatives are close to the number of signatures they need to force the state legislature to respond. We need to be there in Olympia when they arrive, using our Quaker Voices to let our representatives know we do not want to take these great leaps backwards. Please join us. By the way, Quaker Lobby Day is January 25; join us in Olympia or online. See more below.

In the last legislative session, five out of nine Quaker Voice priority bills were signed into law, including a historic step towards housing justice. Capital punishment, an issue we have pursued for many years, was finally removed from state law. You can read the details in our annual report (quakervoicewa.org/legislative-reports).

At our recent Annual Meeting, our new Senior Legislative Advocate, Paul Benz, alerted us to what is coming in 2024. Along with the issues in the initiatives, he reviewed the very limited options the legislature has in responding to them. Our legislators can't just say no. They must either adopt the legislation proposed in each initiative or propose an alternative to accompany it on next November's ballot. If they do nothing, the proposed legislation goes to the ballot alone.

In the process of discerning their legislative priorities for the 2024 session, our three working groups wrestled with the reality of these initiatives. They did this along with facing the perennial dilemmas of tradeoffs between legislation that calls for what we really want and bills that might actually make it through this year if we help them move forward. Here is where the three working groups stood on these dilemmas by the end of the Annual Meeting.

Criminal Justice deliberated on legislation in three priority issue areas: police-related, release from prison, and solitary confinement. The group is looking for legislation that takes police out of activities where potential harm outweighs benefit. This search might lead Criminal Justice to focus on protecting the limits on vehicular pursuit by police that now are under attack in an initiative, or to prioritize a bill that confines the scope of traffic stops. In regard to release from prison, this group might focus on the young (reducing the weight of the system on juvenile defenders) or the elderly (can older and ill prisoners be released without endangering their health care?). The Criminal Justice group will certainly maintain its testimony to limit solitary confinement, seeking a way forward between administrative and legislative proposed solutions.

Economic Justice is continuing its work in housing justice and the income safety net, and adding a new issue area, health equity. In housing justice, rent stabilization is emerging as a major focus across advocacy groups. As bills are introduced, this group will be watching to choose a priority. For the safety net, Guaranteed Basic Income continues to be our priority area, since it both (a) respects the decisions of individuals and families in how they use the unconditional cash it provides to selected groups of low-income households, and (b) has demonstrated long-term effectiveness in pilot projects. In health equity, the group is currently focused on HB 5335, which would establish a single-payer health insurance fund for Washington. This will be a long-term effort.

Environmental Stewardship is reeling from the threat to the Climate Commitment Act, which has already achieved a lot of good for Washington and the global climate. This group may direct our energies to its defense. The Right to Repair bill will be back this year, allowing a broader set of businesses to fix some of our equipment, will lower costs for everyone and produce jobs. The revised bill that will appear this year has the best chance ever of passing. Producer responsibility for plastics is also high on this group's priority list. The commitment of Environment Stewardship to examine legislation in the spirit of respect for the whole natural world is leading toward broader thinking about environmental justice. Our new Legislative Advocate, Jacob Squirrel, has a background in environmental design and will provide deep support for this discernment.

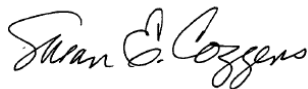
The Annual Meeting, in worship-sharing mode, also listened to Friends who are monitoring our commitments to support indigenous communities, dismantle structural and institutional racism, and respect differences in abilities. We learned that Senior Legislative Advocate Paul Benz has experience and relationships in legislative work with indigenous communities. He will be an asset as we review the priorities set by the tribes to look for opportunities where we can support them.

At this crucial moment for social change, we invite you to

- sign up for **emails from Quaker Voice and from working groups** of your choice through the links on quakervoicewa.org and put info@quakervoicewa.org in your safe sender email list so that you receive our Action Alerts;
- **if you don't want postal mail from us**, let us know with an email to treasurer@quakervoicewa.org, including who you are (!); and
- put Thursday, **January 25**, on your calendar for **Quaker Lobby Day** then watch our emails and our website for information on registering.

Your support and faithfulness are vital to this work. Thank you so much for your past donations of time, talent and money. Be assured every penny you send helps raise our collective Quaker Voices as we uphold economic justice, criminal justice reform, and environmental stewardship in the state of Washington.

Best wishes,



Susan Cozzens, Clerk



Terry Thorsos, Finance and Fundraising

P.S. To support Quaker Voice financially, make a donation at quakervoicewa.org or send a check to our treasurer at

612 S Warner Street, Tacoma, WA 98405