

## Testimonies and Issue Areas, February 2023

Quaker Voice on Washington Public Policy seeks to bring to government in Washington state the values, informed by our spirit led convictions, that should undergird governance and law. We are primarily members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) who bring spiritual values to bear on public policy decisions. Our policy advocacy grows out of our basic belief that there is that of God, or an inner light, in every human being and that this endows all creation with worth and dignity. We strive to make the social, economic, political, and environmental aspects of our lives consistent with our spiritual values and Quaker heritage. We endeavor to live in right relationship with the earth and each other.

We primarily work with members of the state legislature and urge them and others in state government to support policies and actions consistent with our convictions.<sup>1</sup> We work to encourage and facilitate Friends' participation in the state political process, whether as voters, activists, citizen lobbyists, or elected officials. The goals we outline here require profound changes in attitudes and behaviors, both in and out of government. Many of these changes entail personal and material costs; we expect to share in those costs as well as in the benefits.

***We remember that undergirding all the legislative recommendations in this statement are spiritual convictions that ultimately cannot be legislated. They live in each individual conscience, forged and nurtured through ties to family and community, and growing out of a continual search for truth.***

This document presents issue areas that Quakers in the state of Washington have identified as important for state-level action through an open discernment process in 2022. Within these areas, Quaker Voice working groups identify specific priorities for each legislative session. The Quaker Voice Board speaks on issues that span the areas or reflect Quaker testimonies more broadly.

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<sup>1</sup> Should Friends request assistance or advice on a local issue, Quaker Voice will provide it if possible.

## An Earth Restored

### *The testimonies*

*The natural world is not a “gift given to us for our use.” ... When we fully understand that humans are only part of the natural world – not divinely appointed masters or managers of it – we are better able to make Spirit-led decisions that reflect our place in it. We strive for balance, to use what we have wisely and with due care for other creatures, and to live as lightly on the earth as we can. We are answerable to the rest of creation and ultimately to God for how we understand and take our place in the community of life. [North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM), Faith and Practice 2018, p 109]*

### *The Quaker Voice*

*Human beings are an integral part of nature and not separate from it, and we cannot expect to do harm to the environment and not experience the consequences of our acts. How we care or do not care for the earth impacts the ability of humankind to survive, and the ability of thousands of other species and ecosystems to survive as well. ... Strongly mindful of our interdependence with all of creation, and understanding that the biosphere is finite, we commit ourselves to being wise and responsible stewards of the earth, protecting, caring for, nurturing, and regenerating the precious and irreplaceable natural environment of which we are a part. [Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), The World We Seek 2020, p 38-39]*

### **Climate change: Washington’s responsibilities**

Climate change and the depletion of the earth’s ecosystems have already begun to have a devastating impact on all of the earth’s inhabitants, both human and non-human. As part of the global community, the state of Washington can and must develop fair and effective policies to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, promote energy conservation, reduce fuel consumption, and increase efficiency in the consumption of all energy sources. We seek to shift from fossil fuels to safe, clean, and renewable energy sources. Pricing and policy decisions for all forms of energy extraction, production, and use should reflect their true economic, environmental, and social costs.<sup>2</sup>

### **Degradation of the Washington environment**

The economy of the state of Washington has grown in ways that have disrupted ecosystems, polluting our water, deforesting, and making habitats dangerous for many species. The fragile status of the orcas and salmon carry deeper cultural significance, reflecting the problematic way Washington has grown. Quaker Voice seeks state action that restores water, forests, and land, and protects both human and non-human inhabitants of the state. Land use policy should create progress towards ecological balance.

### **Environmental Justice in Washington**

The health burdens of air and water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and other impacts of toxic material in Washington fall most heavily on economically and politically less powerful communities. Quaker Voice seeks state policies that reduce pollution in places where it is highest and take compensatory action. State policies and practices should reduce occupational health dangers, beginning with workers who are most at risk now.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from FCNL The World We Seek, page 39-40.

## Justice for All

### *The testimonies*

*We seriously consider the implications of our employment, our investments, our payment of taxes, and our manner of living as they relate to violence at all levels. We remain sensitive to the covert as well as the overt violence inherent in some of our long-established social practices and institutions, including unfettered capitalism and the unjust distribution of wealth. We work to change those elements which violate our conviction that there is that of God in everyone. ... We refrain from participating in all forms of violence and repression to the best of our understanding. We support efforts toward restorative justice and unbiased policing. [NPYM [Faith and Practice](#) 2018, p 94]*

### *The Quaker Voice*

*We call for a transformation of our current system of criminal justice, which today is used principally as an instrument of retribution — a policy contrary to our Quaker belief in the possibility of redemption — and which leads to mass incarceration. We advocate for crime prevention that recognizes the complex and pervasive causes of crime, which often are rooted in social and economic injustice. We support a system that is not biased by race, gender, or immigration status and that treats juveniles as children, not as adults. [FCNL [The World We Seek](#) 2020, p 18]*

### **Incarceration and Reentry**

More than 35,000 people in the state of Washington are behind bars, in prisons, jails, immigration detention centers, and juvenile justice facilities.<sup>3</sup> Addressing that of God in all individuals, we seek fairness, non-discrimination, and moderation in efforts to maintain public safety through detention, respecting the rights of those in our communities most impacted by the administration of justice. We support reduced use of incarceration by offering alternatives to detention and eliminating excessive sentencing, preparation and rehabilitation for productive life in society, and reduction of obstacles during reentry.

### **Circumstances in Prison**

Overcrowding and inadequate medical attention are among the conditions people incarcerated in Washington state prisons face involuntarily. Focus during detention should be not on punishment but on fair, humane, and non-discriminatory treatment and conditions, and on the opportunity for review and for rehabilitation.

### **Public Safety**

Over the past decade, about one in five homicides in the state of Washington have been at the hands of a law enforcement officer.<sup>4</sup> Law Enforcement has many obligations, but in particular, officers have the responsibility to respect all those whom they serve, to enforce laws without discrimination and excessive force, and to reduce – not perpetrate -- violence. At the same time, many mental health or drug related incidents may be better resolved by professional community responders. Guns and their use need to be regulated to protect citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> [Washington State profile | Prison Policy Initiative](#)

<sup>4</sup> [RPubs - WA since Initiative 940](#)

## Fulfilling Our Potential

### *The testimonies*

*Every person has the capacity to experience the Inner Light. This common humanity transcends our differences. Equality does not mean having the same ability, economic resources, or social status but rather, treating every person with respect and love. ... As Friends, we share a vision of a social order based on the testimony of equality – it embraces and seeks to transform all of human society. This vision, and the inner transformation that enables us to see it and live it, enhances our spiritual connectedness and can transcend our differences. [NPYM [Faith and Practice](#) 2-18, p 104-105]*

### *The Quaker Voice*

*We strive to create an economic system that is equitable and that preserves and enhances resources for future generations. Our measures of economic prosperity must take into account the true costs and benefits of all market and non-market activities. In place of the Gross Domestic Product and other traditional indicators that focus on consumer spending and perpetual economic growth, we support the use of more people-centered economic indicators that measure health, longevity, education, quality of life, income inequality, and other more relevant measures of the impact of economic activity and growth on the environment and human well-being. [FCNL [The World We Seek](#) 2020, p 29]*

### **Housing and homelessness**

Lack of affordable housing is a leading cause of homelessness, widens the wealth gap between owners and renters, increases racial disparities, and forces many workers to find a place to live far away from their jobs, causing still more diminishment in the quality of life for individuals, families, communities, and the environment. Quaker Voice advocates for housing that all people can afford to purchase or rent, allows easy transportation between work and home, and is economically and racially diverse. Our vision of housing justice embraces environmental sustainability by reducing the need for travel as well as sufficient density in metropolitan areas that makes public transportation accessible and effective.

### **Income and wealth**

In the midst of wealth, too many Washingtonians are insecure in housing, food, and employment. Current social support programs are fragmented and restrictive. Quaker Voice seeks a safety net that respects and supports individuals and families with basic income at levels that allow self-sufficiency. Autonomy in decision making is an essential element. We give priority to policies that support intergenerational wealth accumulation in historically disadvantaged communities.

### **Tax reform**

Washington state has the most upside-down tax code in the country, along with some of the wealthiest individuals in the world. Quaker Voice advocates for progressive revenue sources that do not increase the burdens on low-income households resulting from excessive reliance on sales tax. We look for revenue that can be devoted to reducing historical patterns of injustice.

## Equality

### *The Testimony*

*We recognize that members of oppressed groups, especially those easily identifiable by their appearance, are subject to prejudice and discrimination. We know that the same is true of poor people and the working class. They face obstacles, both personal and institutional, that others do not, in gaining education or living wage employment. More subtly, they constantly face the unthinking assumptions of others and a lack of sensitivity*

*to their social conditions. We acknowledge that members of the Religious Society of Friends who are white, or from other entitled groups, may benefit from privilege and may exhibit prejudice and discrimination, even unintentionally. [NPYM [Faith and Practice](#) 2018, p 105]*

### *The Quaker Voice*

*At the center of the Quaker witness is an unwavering belief in and commitment to “the fundamental equality of all members of the human race.” ... Friends are called to promote genuine equality of opportunity and communities in which everyone can safely live, learn, work, worship, and love... [FCNL, [The World We Seek](#), p. 15, quoting Britain Yearly Meeting’s [Faith and Practice](#) 2005]*

#### **Supporting indigenous communities**

Recognizing Washington’s shameful history of colonization, Quaker Voice attends to the positions taken by the state’s indigenous nations and upholds those nations’ values in legislative action.

#### **Dismantling structural and institutional racism**

Acknowledging the deep divisions carved in Washington’s social and economic structure by racism, Quaker Voice listens to the priorities of people of color and seeks to incorporate action to dismantle racism across and beyond the issue areas articulated in this document.

#### **Respecting differences in abilities**

Facing transportation, communication, and educational systems that put barriers in the pathways to developing everyone’s potential, Quaker Voice stands together with Washington’s disability rights advocates and seeks to open opportunity for all through state policies and practices.

#### **Welcoming immigrants**

Recognizing that today’s immigrants face many hurdles as they adjust to life in a new country, we urge state government to leave immigration policy enforcement to Federal agencies and to include immigrant communities in State social service programs, while working to protect their fundamental human rights.

#### **Protecting democracy**

Needing to find Truth through a process of listening to all voices, Quaker Voice supports election and voting integrity as well as public accountability in all its forms throughout the state.

## Quaker Voice Priorities

The issue areas articulated here form broad guidance for Quaker Voice action. The major route for putting the testimonies into action is active advocacy on a small number of bills in each legislative session. Each year, working groups<sup>5</sup> choose those bills based not only on the testimonies but on legislative feasibility and the presence of a champion within Quaker Voice. In addition, working groups may designate a second group of bills for lighter monitoring. The working group clerks work with the Legislative Advocate to choose times for Action Alerts on specific bills or decisions in front of state decisionmakers. A designated set of volunteers brings bills in the Equality areas to the Board’s attention for possible action; anyone is welcome to do the same.

At the core of all these steps are the relationships Quaker Voice activists build with legislators in their home districts and on key committees, through an in-session Quaker Lobby Day and throughout the year.

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<sup>5</sup> There are currently three working groups, Criminal Justice, Economic Justice, and Environmental Stewardship, but the number and focus have changed over time and can continue to evolve.