**PEACE AND SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE (PSC)**

**Annual Report 2023**

The main project of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee this year was our **Networking Day,** held April 15 at Friends Meeting of Washington. Despite the dreary rain of the day, the event was attended (in person or via zoom) by 40 Friends from numerous monthly meetings.

Our keynote speaker, Lauren Brownlee, began the program with a panel of young Friends on “The Power of Intergenerational Peacebuilding.” Lauren, a former principal of Carolina Friends School, is FCNL’s inaugural Associate General Secretary for Community and Culture. Following her presentation, there were two sets of two workshops each on Restorative justice, Climate Change, Reproductive justice, and our Peace testimony. Continental breakfast and lunch were provided.

Evaluations contained many positive comments, especially about the opportunity to talk with Friends from differing monthly meetings.

**In other actions**, PSC was tasked with finding a new liaison to IAHR (Interfaith Alliance for Justice Reform) which concerns itself with humane and just treatment of persons incarcerated and after their release. Barbara Bezdek agreed to take on this role with support from outgoing liaison Suzanne O’Hatnick.

**Several working groups** under the care of PSC have been active during the year: Reproductive Justice, War and Militarism, and Quaker Voice of Maryland.

 Reproductive Justice: In addition to its information-rich workshop on many states’ intensifying efforts to restrict reproductive rights, the WG sent a statement to FCNL as part of its public discernment process, including the 3 minutes that BYM has passed over the years.

 War & Militarism: The working group advanced BYM Friends’ engagement with the voyage of The Golden Rule and its witness with a concern for nuclear weapons intersecting with climate change, and holds a monthly discussion group to assess the issue and develop a path of action.

 Quaker Voice of Maryland remains small yet mightily active consulting with Monthly Meetings and lifting up Quaker concerns on selected Maryland legislation.

The following appendices provide fuller accounts by these working groups

Respectfully submitted by Annette Breiling, clerk, and Barbara Bezdek, recording clerk

Additional active members and participants of the PSC have been Richard Capron, Phil Caroom, Tamina Chowdury, Bob Rhudy, and Suzanne O’Hatnick.

**Appendix A**

**Baltimore Yearly Meeting Reproductive Justice Working Group (RJWG)**

Under the care of BYM Peace and Social Justice Committee

Submitted By Sharon Stout

*Activities from Fall 2022 through Summer 2023*

Introduction:

The RJWG was formed in response to the Dobbs Versus Jackson Women’s Health Clinic Supreme Court decision handed down June 2022, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/supreme-court-case-library/dobbs-v-jackson-womens-health-organization>. The Court's decision overruled both Roe v. Wade (1973) and Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992), returning to individual states the power to regulate any aspect of abortion not protected by federal law.

The Working group has met regularly and made efforts to stay informed concerning the changing state laws that directly affect the availability of abortion and other aspects of women’s reproductive health care in the United States. At this writing, laws adversely affecting the availability of abortion continue to be proposed and enacted in state legislatures, and many cases are making their way through state and federal courts. See <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>

The Working group recognizes that confusion and chaos associated with rapidly changing laws are having negative impacts on patients and providers. Laws that restrict abortion access disproportionately affect persons of the Global Majority.

We believe that restrictions on abortion access directly relate to the Religious Society of Friend’s Testimony on Equality, and to the Yearly Meetings statements on working to become an anti-racist society.

*Mission Statement*: Given this information the working Group united with this mission statement:

The BYM P & SC Reproductive Working Group advocates, and organizes for rights and access to contraception, abortion, bodily autonomy, and Reproductive Justice.  We advocate for people who want to have children or not to have children and the right to choose.

Efforts in 2023:

The RJWG

* responded to the Friends Committee on National Legislation’s request for input from Friends to guide discernment of its policy around issues of reproductive health care, including abortion. Our response in full is attached at the end of this report.
* Reviewed the minutes that Baltimore Yearly Meeting approved in the past on Reproductive Justice and Abortion. These minutes remain the statement of the yearly meeting on these issues. These are included in the text of the working group’s response to FCNL, included in its entirety below.
* Encouraged members of the working group to help their monthly meetings to consider the topic of reproductive justice and a response to the Dobbs Decision.
* Presented a workshop on Reproductive Justice on April 15 at the BYM Peace and Social Concerns Networking Day held at Friends Meeting of Washington.
* Began the process of tracking and collecting monthly meetings’ responses to concerns about reproductive justice.

Date: May 1, 2023, TO: FCNL

RESPONSE TO FCNL REQUEST FOR DISCERNMENT REGARDING REPRODUCTION AND ABORTION

FROM: Baltimore Yearly Meeting PEACE AND SOCIAL CONCERNS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE WORKING GROUP

Co-Clerks of the Working Group:
Sharon Stout Adelphi Friends Meeting Katherine Cole Herndon Friends Meeting

*What world do we seek?*

A world where all people can fulfill their potential, which requires equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. We are reminded of the words of Benjamin Lay: may the world be “a paradise again, to all people, as it is to some.”

*What would reproduction look like in that world?*

Every child in every family wanted, nourished, nurtured, supported and educated; every adult empowered to choose how and when they reproduce, and whether or not they parent.

What does reproductive health care look like in the world that you and your community seek?

All people are respected, and all parties are given the information and resources they need to reach their potential – as progenitors, parents, patients, and caregivers.

We equitably distribute choice and responsibility between potentially pregnant people and potential impregnators, to respect the agency and bodily autonomy of all parties.

We correct as best we can for individual and societal failures to equitably distribute choice and agency – the opportunities to have children, not have children, and raise the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. In the United States, this means that obstetric care, contraception, and abortion care are accessible to everyone, no matter their economic or financial circumstances or where they live in the country.

To us, this means:

The law does not prohibit access to medical standard of care protocols for obstetric emergencies, contraception, or abortion, for anyone;
Obstetric care, contraception, and abortion care are covered by private and public health care plans.

There is no criminalization of persons obtaining or helping women, or providing medical standard of care abortions.

This goes beyond abortion care, as well:

●  Reproductive justice means that the law treats same sex couples and heterosexual couples equally regarding all legal rights, including those about having or adopting children.

●  Reproductive justice includes generous paid parental leave, affordable daycare, public preschool, livable wages, and high quality education for all.

As Friends, we seek this world proactively via education, advocacy, and support for those seeking health care, including reproductive health care.

*What testimonies do we rely on?*

**Equality**. As documented by the New England Journal of Medicine, abortion access is a racial justice issue:

“As restrictions on abortion increase, racial injustice in health will persist and worsen. The adverse health effects of the Dobbs decision will fall hardest on patients, clinicians, clinics, health care systems, and communities in states with the highest maternal mortality and the biggest racial inequities in maternal and reproductive health. For example... in Mississippi, a Black person is 118 times more likely to die from carrying a pregnancy to term than from having a legal abortion. Indeed, Black and Indigenous people face disproportionate health risks when they become pregnant, and the places where these risks are highest are also those where it’s nearly impossible to receive or provide the health care patients may need to protect their life, their safety, or their family.”

**Justice**
In dissent in Gonzales v. Carhart, Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote: “[L]egal challenges to undue restrictions on abortion procedures...center on a woman’s autonomy to determine her life’s course, and thus to enjoy equal citizenship stature.” Constraining only pregnant people by restricting abortion access, as though nature ordained it (despite advances in medicine and technology), is unjust.

**Simplicity**. We trust patients to make healthcare decisions together with their physicians, rooted in medical best practices and the nuances of individual health circumstances (including mental health).

Should the FCNL Policy Statement be revised on the issues of abortion and reproductive health and abortion? If so, what should the Policy Statement say?

FCNL’s Policy Statement reads: “III.2.6: Health Care. Universal access to affordable, effective, comprehensive health care is a right and is necessary to allow all people to fulfill their potential...”

“III.2.7. NOTE: Members of the Society of Friends are not in unity on abortion issues. Therefore, FCNL takes no position and does not act either for or against abortion legislation. On occasion, FCNL may appeal to lawmakers not to use the abortion debate to paralyze action on other legislation.”

FCNL is to be commended for efforts to test whether and where Friends have unity (remembering unity is not consensus).

We ask the FCNL Policy Committee to note the potential contradictions between the above policy statements:

● There is no “universal access to affordable, effective, comprehensive health care” without universal access to obstetric care, abortion care, and contraception.

●  There is no “universal access to affordable, effective, comprehensive health care” in a world where doctors fear legal repercussions for providing patients with medical standard of care procedures.

●  There is no “universal access to affordable, effective, comprehensive health care” where people seeking reproductive health care cannot obtain due to the many societal obstacles put in their way–including transportation, childcare, leave from work, lack of information about where care can be obtained.

FCNL’s policy statement should be updated to read, “Universal access to affordable, effective, comprehensive health care, including reproductive health care and abortion access, is a right and is necessary to allow all people to fulfill their potential,” explicitly recognizing that the exclusion of reproductive health care from the statement would be a failure of justice.

As lobbyists, FCNL should be alert for provisions with implications for Reproductive Justice that may come up in the current Congress, including.

1) Federal budget
2) Debt limit
3) National Defense Authorization Act
4) Authorization for the Use of Military Force 5) Railroads; and
6) Court nominations.

and be prepared to make statements and organize Friends to lobby against any provisions limiting access to reproductive health care—including abortion care.

RELEVANT MINUTES ALREADY APPROVED BY BYM – FROM AUGUST 1979 ANNUAL SESSIONS:

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends opposes any U.S. Constitutional Amendment which would outlaw abortion.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is advised that in recent months steps toward dialogue have been taken by persons with differing positions on the abortion issue. We urge concerned Friends and Meetings to take part in and nurture this process.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends recognizes and reaffirms the basic commitment of Friends to the sacredness of life as well as the quality of life. We do not advocate or encourage abortion as a desirable method of birth control. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that in some extremely unfortunate circumstances a woman might find abortion the least undesirable of several tragic options. The responsibility for making such a decision ultimately rests with the pregnant woman herself. We affirm every pregnant woman’s right to safe and effective medical care throughout her pregnancy and the birth. When abortions are performed, safe

and professional medical procedures should be assured.

IN PREVIOUS MINUTES WHAT DID BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING GET RIGHT AND WHAT DID WE FAIL TO ANTICIPATE?

What did BYM Friends get right in 1979 and what do we stand by?

Friends support efforts to prevent unwanted pregnancies, including education, comprehensive sex education, freely available contraception, and abortion.
While some Friends find abortion troubling, BYM Friends support pregnant people who choose abortion as the best of the options available to them.
BYM Friends support religious freedom, the separation of church and state. We oppose efforts to criminalize abortion.

What did BYM Friends not anticipate in 1979?

BYM Friends under-estimated the power of economic class, racism, and misogyny in society at large in our thinking. Friends missed how buffered we were by privilege -- that rights to healthcare did not equate to access. An emerging awareness of a Justice Testimony among Friends and increased exposure to BIPOC Friends, the Black Lives Matter movement, and video evidence (the deaths of Philando Castile, George Floyd and others) have increased our awareness that we need to work on Reproductive Justice for all, necessitating social and economic programs to assist pregnant people and their families; economic circumstances should not compel women to seek abortion.

[SisterSong defines Reproductive Justice as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children].

BYM Friends failed to anticipate and address legislative efforts to restrict access to abortion. We failed to anticipate that Roe v. Wade would be overturned by the Dobbs decision, and that old laws still on the books and “trigger laws” would come into effect, creating a patchwork of differing laws in states regarding healthcare -- making healthcare decisions complex for patients and providers, and creating new challenges for long-standing Constitutional rights.

BYM Friends did not anticipate scientific and technical changes in reproductive technology, and in contraception. Nor did they anticipate that a single judge would try to decide FDA policy.

BYM did not know that politicians would start talking about life – and human personhood or fetal personhood -- beginning at conception. Such arguments rely on faulty science and faulty logic. Stigmatizing abortion threatens life-saving care for pregnant people.

**Appendix B**

**Annual Report 2023**

**Working Group on War and Militarism**

“The original purpose for this Working Group, formed in September 2021, was that its activities include study, action, advocacy, and collaborative work through coalitions with other faith, community, and peace groups. Group members agreed to prioritize concerns related to military spending and nuclear weapons, plus other issues as they emerge or as people feel led.

“A key goal for this Working Group is to engage more people, both in Monthly Meetings and in our communities, in the work for peace.” (from the Annual Report 2022)

Activities during the 2022-2023 year have included:

1. Presentation of a power-point slide show on nuclear weapons by Jean Athey at Sandy Spring MM.
2. A day-long planning retreat at Frederick MM.
3. Motivating the passage of the “Back from the Brink” resolution, calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, by the Frederick (MD) City Council.
4. A reading group on “The Voyage of the Golden Rule: and Experiment with the Truth,” by Quaker Albert Bigelow.
5. Supporting the conscientious objector workshop, led by Phil Caroom, during March and April.
6. Continuing participation in the “Roses to Embassies” project in Washington, DC, thanking countries which have signed the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
7. Participation in the BYM Networking day in April at Friends Meeting of Washington. Jean Athey and representatives of the Golden Rule reported on the sailing tour to abolish nuclear weapons.
8. Throughout the past year individual members of the Working Group participated in various actions to promote global peace.

Special thanks to Jean Athey for her leadership over the past two years. Jean has decided to step down, but the Working Group plans to continue as Stan Becker and Richard Capron have assumed the role of co-clerks. If you would like to participate in the Working Group, please contact Stan Becker (sbecker2@jhu.edu) or Richard Capron (capronphd@hotmail.com)

Submitted by Stan Becker

**Appendix C**

**Quaker Voice of Maryland Working Group**

Quaker Voice of Maryland is a working group under the care of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends. Our purpose is to advocate for laws and policies in Maryland that are just, compassionate, equitable, and respectful of the inherent worth of every person and the Earth upon which we live. We are nonpartisan. Each legislative term, we choose a few pieces of legislation for each of the major topics of interest to Friends. This past year the three priorities were as follows:

* Climate Change - *Supported 3 bills*
* Criminal Justice Reform - *Supported 3 bills*
* Civil Rights - *Supported 2 bills*

As always, we used a combination of education, lobbying, and respectful activism to influence the policy positions of elected and appointed officials, regardless of party affiliation. For a report on each of our priorities in 2023, please see the attachment (“Quaker Voice 2023, End of Legislative Session Update”) below.

The clerk of the working group had the privilege to provide updates on the legislative priorities to the following Friends during 2023:

* Feb. 12, 2023 - Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting
* April 15, 2023 - BYM Peace and Social Concerns Networking Day
* June 11, 2023 - Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting

If you or your Meeting would like a briefing during the next Maryland legislative session, please get in touch with the clerk or any member of the working group.

Our greatest challenge, which limits our ability to act, is recruiting active working group members. Ideally, we would have several Friends representing a variety of geographical locations across Maryland. In short, we can do more if we have the human and financial support needed to educate, lobby, and advocate. Currently we have no financial budget, but we do maintain a website that has a $15 annual fee which is covered by donations.

Looking forward, we are actively seeking opportunities to connect with Quaker working groups, committees, etc. so we can be lifting each other’s efforts during the 2024 legislative session.

Friends who have supported the working group over the past several months are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Phil Caroom (Annapolis)Dona Source (Third Haven)Molly Finch, Clerk Clinton Pettus (Stony Run, Third Haven)Annette Breiling (Frederick) | Pierce HammondBarbara Bezdek (Homewood)Erinn Camp MansourMolly Mitchell (Homewood) |

Attachment: Quaker Voice 2023, End of Legislative Session Update: (<http://bitly.ws/P5wF>)

Prepared by working group clerk Molly Finch