**Minute in Support of a Truth and Healing Commission for Native Peoples**  
brought forward by Indian Affairs Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting  
  
**MINUTE**

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting wholeheartedly supports the establishment of a national commission to seek truth and a measure of justice for those still suffering the residual effects of public policies that created and maintained hundreds of boarding schools for Indigenous children in the United States from 1869 through the 1960s. We support legislation to fund such a commission. Once established we will hold the people who come before it and the commission members in the Light, in expectation that airing of harms and traumas will lead to some healing of long-suffered wounds. We want a commission that yields real results and changes, not a report that gathers dust on a shelf.

We applaud the fact that one intention of the commission is to prevent continued removal of Indigenous (American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian) children from their families, communities, and cultural connections by adoption and foster care agencies.

We urge research by faith groups that ran residential schools, especially the Religious Society of Friends, to provide explicit data requested by the federal government as part of the commission’sdocumentation of *all* boarding schools and students. We believe accountability requires robust cooperation.

**BACKGROUND**.

*Proposed Legislation*. In both houses of Congress, bills named “To establish the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States” have been introduced. Such a commission is similar to one created in Canada. Its formation has been urged by a wide array of Indigenous organizations. This proposed legislation focuses on the federal government’s past role in running schools and the commission’s present role to hold hearings and make recommendations. Part of the commission’s duties will be to collect information from religious groups that ran boarding schools-- including records related to attendance, infirmary care, deaths, land, tribal affiliation, and related correspondence. Friends may need to hire an archivist to provide such (scattered) information.

*Responsibility*. Healing requires recognition and a reckoning. We, as part of the larger community of the Religious Society of Friends, recognize that early Friends, including Friends from Baltimore Yearly Meeting, were part of a system of continued colonization **as** teachers and Indian agents. We acknowledge the role of our predecessors, our faith, and in some cases our own ancestors, in promoting, participating, and benefitting from the US federal policy to force assimilation of Indigenous children by creating and supporting Indian Boarding Schools. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition states there were 16 Quaker boarding schools. Researcher Paula Palmer found that Quakers “managed over 30 schools for Indian children, most of them boarding schools, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” Such schools operated for varying periods of time, some in collaboration with the federal government.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting also had a role in efforts to “educate and civilize” Native Americans. We need to bring ourselves to learn this Quaker history, to help correct the harms done in any way possible, and to question future actions that may start from the same ethnocentric or colonizing roots.

*BYM Indian Affairs Committee Discernment*. Through inquiry, reading, and listening, Committee members are keenly aware that Quakers were, by their direct engagement and involvement, one agency of this now widely discredited educational system. Members also studied broader, historic Quaker roles to advance justice and provide support (now often considered paternalistic). Earlier Friends, being true to their Lights, with sincerity and integrity sought to increase literacy, vocational industry, agrarianism, domesticity, civility, and sobriety among Native populations that brutal colonists had subjugated and disenfranchised, dispossessed and relocated, impoverished and culturally diminished. Earlier Friends also urged the creation of private rather than communal property. With hindsight of the consequences, we view those interventions differently while still valuing the original desire to be of support. We seek to learn more from Indigenous groups about appropriate support/allyship today.

We deeply regret that education turned into cultural indoctrination and forced assimilation. Members have heard, especially from Native voices, that whatever the relationships with or motivations were, the intended outcomes and the unintended consequences of the boarding school system remain as a deep well of grief and sorrow to Native persons, their families and their communities. It is this contemporary suffering that concerned Friends would have be relieved by an institutional process of truth and healing proposed by Native peoples themselves. Adopting the above Minute is one small step BYM Friends can take.

*Broader Quaker Concern*. Similar minutes have been approved by the New York, Southeast, and Intermountain Yearly meetings. Friends Committee on National Legislation, Decolonizing Quakers, Right Relationship groups, and others have urged the formation of the Committee.

**EDUCATION FOR BYM MONTHLY MEETINGS**

To understand what a national inquiry can achieve, in terms of honor and dignity for victims and some closure for families, see a summary of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission ( <https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf> ).

To understand the cultural differences that affected Quaker-Native education, read parts of the 1816-1831 journal of Quaker schoolmaster Joseph Elkinton in a dissertation by Jill Kinney at (<file:///C:/Users/patri/Downloads/Jill_Kinney_Dissertation%20(2).pdf> ).

To learn the history of the Quaker Indian schools, see <https://swarthmorevoices.com/content-1/2019/11/20/the-quaker-indian-boarding-schools-facing-our-history-and-ourselves> and read Martha Claire Catlin’s book published in 2021 entitled *As They Were Led: Quakerly Steps and Missteps Toward Native Justice, 1795-1940*.

Also consider ways to support Native-managed healing processes, including programs to teach Native languages, prevent youth suicide, and to promote awareness on the critical issue of murdered and missing indigenous women (see <https://www.nativehope.org/en-us/understanding-the-issue-of-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women>). The Canadian Friends Service Committee has a reconciliation fund (see https://quakerservice.ca/our-work/indigenous-peoples-rights/reconciliation-fund/).

**QUERIES**.

To progress towards a deeper appreciation of this concern, the Indian Affairs Committee offers the following Queries:  
  
How am I led in the Spirit to address the particular concern of this committee, that is, of the need for a commission for truth and healing for the relief of the survivors and descendants of Indian boarding schools?  
  
What deeper insight do I need, what more information should I gather, to bring me to a right understanding of this suffering and support for moving beyond this Minute?  
  
Upon reflection, how am I moved by consideration of the long-term and residual effects of the historic Indian boarding school policy?

Is our Meeting willing to support a fund to research any existing records of Quaker-operated boarding schools?

Is our Meeting willing to support a fund to provide compensation money to boarding school victim’s families?   
  
Is there a different Indigenous cause, such as reparations or land-back, that I will pursue?

In view of my own concerns and of the many other cares and sufferings in the world, how prepared, how willing am I to be called to “preach truth and do righteousness” *in unity with* these much-abused people?