

# Washington Newsletter

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**Ten years ago, FCNL embraced an idea that turned out to be transformative: What if people across the country had access to expert lobbying advice and training from our Washington, D.C. staff? With training and support from FCNL staff, could volunteer advocates lobby consistently and effectively?**

That question was put to the test in June 2015, when FCNL launched seven Advocacy Teams to lobby for the Iran Nuclear Deal. In two months, these teams held dozens of lobby visits and published numerous letters to the editor. Their efforts contributed to the deal's success.

# A Decade of Strategic Advocacy Campaigns

By Tim Heishman





Even when teams did not achieve an immediate policy win, they built long-term influence. The Waterloo (IA) Advocacy Team, for example, could not sway Senator Grassley (IA) on the Iran deal, but they earned the trust of his staff and met with him personally. He told them, “We weren’t on the same side on this issue, but I hope we are on the next.”

His words were prescient. The following year, the team worked with Sen. Grassley on criminal justice reform. They helped ensure that his Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S. 2123) included provisions addressing the influx of Black men into the prison system. Their advocacy helped cement Sen. Grassley’s determination to make sentencing reform non-negotiable. When the First Step Act (P.L. 115- 391) became law in 2018, it bore the imprint of their local advocacy on the national stage.

Over ten years, Advocacy Teams worked on nine legislative issues. While the teams found early success lobbying on both foreign and domestic policies, they have since focused on foreign policy. Teams advocated to repeal outdated war authorizations, prevent wars with North Korea and Iran, rein in wasteful Pentagon spending, invest in peacebuilding funding, and end U.S. support for wars in Yemen and Gaza.

This consistent focus has led to an outsized impact. Teams have developed deep expertise in foreign policy issues, and because most other constituents lobby on domestic issues, their voices on foreign policy often carry greater weight on Capitol Hill.

Advocacy Teams have made measurable progress in shaping U.S. foreign policy. They worked for several years to repeal the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force in Iraq. Repeal measures passed the House in 2019 and 2021, and the Senate in 2023—each time with bipartisan support.

In 2022, as Yemen faced one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises, Teams played a key role in securing co-sponsors for the Yemen War Powers Resolution. Although the resolution did not pass, their advocacy increased the pressure for policy changes that led to an eventual ceasefire and greater regional stability.

Among all the issues Advocacy Teams have taken on, reining in Pentagon spending has proven the most challenging. Runaway military spending fuels global conflict and diverts resources from pressing human needs. As with the long-term effort to repeal the Iraq and Afghanistan war authorizations—a campaign that spans decades—teams are now laying the groundwork for change. We hope to build a bipartisan consensus that a \$1 trillion Pentagon budget does not serve our security, our economy, or our values.

While continuing the time-tested model of organizing around one central legislative campaign, Teams have shown they are ready to take on more issues at the same time. This year, Advocacy Teams launched a secondary campaign to confront the climate crisis. In just six months, they conducted 35 lobby visits on climate.

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AP Photo/Bill Hudson

▲ Youth carry signs, chant, and sing as they stage a demonstration at the courthouse in Selma, Alabama, Feb. 5, 1965, challenging voting restrictions. More than 400 were arrested and marched off to a compound.

# Sixty Years of the Voting Rights Act

An interview with  
José Moreno

## Why is the Voting Rights Act important?

The United States was founded on principles of freedom and equality but was built on the backs of enslaved people and immigrants. Today we see an executive branch zealous in silencing free speech; efforts to make the House districts less democratic; and onerous laws that make voting more difficult.

In an increasingly diverse country, laws such as the Voting Rights Act seek to limit injustices, ensure that all can access their government, and enable everyone to have a say in who makes and implements laws. The Voting Rights Act, passed 60 years ago, is a means to achieve the lofty ideals of our increasingly multiracial democracy.

## What threats is the Act facing?

To make elections have “more integrity” some actors seek to game the system in their party’s or candidate’s favor by erecting barriers to voting, in the name of “preventing fraud.” This includes legislative proposals for more voter ID laws, limiting absentee voting, and requiring proof of citizenship. Research by the Brookings Institution found that voter fraud takes place less than 1% of the time in a span of 13–38 years.

## How has the reduction of the act's powers impacted vulnerable communities?

The Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision pointed to strides towards racial justice in our society. But the justices used this reasoning to eliminate the very sections of the Voting Rights Act that helped us get to this place. The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg compared the decision to throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because it was working.

Our complex system of state governments, federal government, and judicial elections is a lot to track. On top of this, complex requirements lower turnout by making it harder to register, plan, and vote.

Diluting protections that help people exercise their right to vote further depresses turnout and defaults our democracy and levers of power to serving the wealthy and the powerful.

## How does a strong Voting Rights Act contribute to a resilient democracy?

The Voting Rights Act (P. L. 89–110) is a landmark law that sought to correct the ugliness of our past. Our democracy started with only white, male property owners having a say in our government. With each generation, we have expanded the franchise, but our systems, stained by racism and white supremacy, are run by imperfect people.

That is why we need strong laws, and by extension, strong bills to pass like the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 14). This will ensure that we continue to strive for a just and free multiracial democracy that gives equal weight and opportunity to everyone.

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▼ José Moreno speaks on the Capitol lawn during Faithful Witness Wednesdays, a series of vigils this spring at the Capitol. You can read more about these events in Bridget Moix's article from Religion News Service, "A Springtime for Moral Courage."



## Friends Committee on National Legislation

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**Clerk:** Michael Fuson

**Assistant Clerk:** Kitty Ufford-Chase

**General Secretary:** Bridget Moix

**Editors:** Greg Williams, Celia Acedo

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245 2nd Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-547-6000

**Website:** [fcnl.org](http://fcnl.org)

**Email:** [info@fcnl.org](mailto:info@fcnl.org)

**Facebook:** [quakerlobby](https://www.facebook.com/quakerlobby)

**Bluesky:** [fcnl.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/fcnl.bsky.social)

**Instagram:** [quakerlobby](https://www.instagram.com/quakerlobby)

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### Editor's Note

In order to continue providing a high-quality newsletter to as many advocates as possible, the Washington Newsletter will now be published quarterly.

This coincides with the launch of a more robust digital newsletter, featuring articles from our active blog written by the FCNL community of staff, activists, and organizers. Subscribe at [FCNL.org/GetNewsletter](https://fcnl.org/GetNewsletter).



# “We Can Persist Because We Are Not Alone”

By Kristen Archer

**How does an organization turn a prophetic call into collective action? This was the question FCNL faced nearly two decades ago. The “War is Not the Answer” movement had sparked widespread energy, and members of FCNL’s General Committee and staff were ready to build on that momentum.**

Among them was Jim Cason, former associate general secretary for policy and advocacy, who came to FCNL with a leading to engage more people in the political process. When Diane Randall became general secretary, she shared a vision to deepen FCNL’s advocacy. By then, Annual Meeting already included lobbying, with many arriving early to participate.

As Cason recalled, Randall asked, “Why not make lobbying an expectation?” The network enthusiastically responded.

Through deep listening and building on past efforts, FCNL established the Advocacy Teams network in 2015 to make this vision real.

Today, the network includes 1,500 Quakers and friends in 135 teams—now in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. They lobby congressional offices, publish in local media, and organize community events to advance peace and justice, grounded in a commitment to mutual respect and listening.

The power of Advocacy Teams lies in their simplicity. “The most energizing part of this work,” said Tim Heishman, who leads the program, “is helping people realize they can use their voice for change. With a little training and the right tools, they see they can make a real difference—and that gives me hope for our democracy.”

Nancy Bermon, from the Stony Point, NY, team—FCNL’s 32nd—recently shared how her region had grown to more than eight teams. They regularly coordinate their advocacy across the state.

◀ Advocacy Teams members from around the country met up for dinner at the 2024 FCNL Annual Meeting. It was great to connect, share notes, and build hope for our lobbying efforts.





Photo by Joe Molieri/FCNL

Advocacy Teams

◀ A new video celebrates 10 years of Advocacy Teams work. The video features FCNL staff, Advocacy Teams members around the country, and meaningful messages from Rep. Jimmy Panetta (CA-19) and Sen. Todd Young (IN).

Watch it at [fcnl.org/teams](https://fcnl.org/teams) or by scanning this QR code.



FCNL has cultivated similar statewide networks of Advocacy Teams, a practice that is expanding and deepening the impact of the program.

The grassroots momentum continues to grow. Susan Burt of Normal, IL, had known of FCNL since becoming a Quaker in 1980 but only learned about Advocacy Teams two years ago during an FCNL discussion of the book, *Light in Gaza*. When she heard the 2025 campaign would focus on a Gaza ceasefire, she was moved to act.

Burt brought the idea to her meeting and to friends. Working from a list of 23 committed individuals, they launched the Normal, IL, Advocacy Team early this year. The team now includes Friends, Methodists, Mennonites, Catholics, Unitarians, and unaffiliated advocates. Heishman called her swift organizing “an antidote to despair.”

Each time Heishman and Burt checked in, she added more names to her list. Multiply her list by thousands of individuals and communities nationwide, and you begin to see the power of FCNL’s advocacy in action.

At FCNL’s 80th anniversary in 2023, General Secretary Bridget Moix reflected, “If there is anything that is constant about Quakerism, it is needing to be open to continuing revelation. That means being courageous enough to know that we need to continue changing and evolving and responding to the needs that the world has.”

LaVida Davis, FCNL’s director of strategic advocacy, views Advocacy Teams as the foundation of the organization’s work. But the program is far from static. In response to continuing revelation, the program has become more dynamic, adapting to meet increasingly complex challenges.


“Instead of one bill and one ask, the asks now shift,” Davis explained. “We’ve equipped advocates to adjust based on whether they’re lobbying the House or Senate, or to take on additional asks as needed.”

This year, Teams adopted a secondary campaign—on climate change—allowing them to stay active if they have extra capacity or if the primary issue does not resonate with their lawmakers.

Justin Hurdle, FCNL’s advocacy campaigns and stakeholder engagement manager, says this added flexibility strengthens team members as multi-issue advocates. It also increases the relevance of FCNL’s work with each member of Congress.

Several interviewees credited Tim Heishman and Eleni Sefanit Retta, Advocacy Teams organizer, for their leadership in shaping and supporting the program’s evolution—a reflection of the long-standing commitment to advocates across the country.


Alicia McBride, senior director of Quaker leadership, affirmed this: “Alongside building relationships and engaging across differences, being supported by the institution behind you is deeply powerful.”

That support and the relationships it fosters sustain this work. As Heishman put it, “Advocacy Teams show that we can persist because we’re not alone.” 

*Kristen Archer is an FCNL communications consultant.*

### *A Decade from page 3*

Their advocacy prevented some of the most harmful effects of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (P.L. 119-21).

In a time of deep polarization and accelerating crises, the FCNL Advocacy Teams' witness is more vital than ever. Rooted in faith and grounded in relationship-building, Teams continue to speak truth to power, call for justice, and sow the seeds of peace across all 50 states and on Capitol Hill. 

*Tim Heishman is FCNL's senior Advocacy Teams manager.*

To start an Advocacy Team, visit [www.fcnl.org/teams](http://www.fcnl.org/teams).


### *Voting Rights Act from page 5*

#### **How were Quakers involved in the Voting Rights Act and protecting it today?**

Leading up to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Friends ensured that FCNL's work in Congress continue to advance the gains of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (P.L. 88-352).

Friends knew that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did much to advance the equal opportunity of non-whites "to assure equal access to public accommodations, educational and employment opportunities, and [authorize] the cutting off of federal funds where discrimination is practiced in public programs." Friends pushed for additional legislation to ensure the right to vote.

According to the current FCNL Statement on Legislative Policy, "Our democracy can live up to its potential only if the government ensures open access to public office and electoral processes; curbs the influence of money and corporate power; safeguards the integrity of the voting process without raising unnecessary barriers; provides full participation for disenfranchised people, including those currently and formerly incarcerated; and protects and secures electoral and voting procedures from foreign and domestic interference."

Today Friends and FCNL continue to strive for equal access to the right to vote by advocating for bills like the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. 

*José Moreno is FCNL's director for justice reform. Interview by Adlai Amor, FCNL communications consultant.*

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## ***Beauty*** forged from Vietnam War ***shrapnel*** made by ***artisans*** in ***Laos***

Each **Ornament**<sup>1</sup>, **Bracelet**<sup>2</sup>, and **Necklace**<sup>3</sup> helps clear unexploded ordinance in Laos and supports FCNL's advocacy to end cluster bombs and landmines forever.



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