

Washington Newsletter

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The FCNL Campus Chapter from Western Carolina University in North Carolina on a lobby visit.



FCNL Expands Strategic Advocacy Programs

By Adlai Amor

As FCNL celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Advocacy Teams and the Advocacy Corps, we also embarked on two new innovative programs to widen and strengthen our lobbying network.

Two years ago, we started a program to train activists from communities with origins outside the U.S. (Diaspora Organizing Program). Last year, we began to formally organize campus chapters around the country (FCNL Campus Chapters).

Unlike other advocates, the diaspora organizers are recruited directly from leaders in communities most impacted by harmful foreign policy. The program strengthens their advocacy skills, helps them lobby Congress directly, and provides ongoing support after a four-day training in Washington, DC. To date, 31 activists from diaspora communities around the country have participated.

Activists represent the diaspora communities of Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iran, Niger, Rwanda, South Korea, Venezuela, Yemen, and the Rohingyas of Bangladesh.

“What emerged from our 2023 gathering was a strong sense of connection,” wrote Hadiya Afzal, former FCNL diaspora engagement and partnership organizer. “People who have been oppressed and exploited, who have experienced violence and occupation, will never fail to realize the connections between their struggles.”

The cohorts have diverse backgrounds, including academics, community leaders, and students. During their training, they highlighted their stories and causes.

Last October, advocates from Haiti recounted the painful aftermath of Haitians being accused of eating dogs during the 2024 presidential campaign and their struggle for Temporary Protected Status (TPS). A Burmese activist spoke about the military junta’s violence and the need to protect the Rohingya people. An Ethiopian activist spoke about lobbying for humanitarian aid to people in the Tigray region.

“Listening to their stories and causes was both humbling and illuminating” wrote Jim Ngokwey, who

participated in this year’s training. “They revealed a simple truth: peace flows from advocacy and organizing by local and diaspora communities working together to bring change.”

He added that with collaboration, community, and continuous learning, diaspora organizers can build the kind of long-term influence that makes peace and justice possible —“not just for our countries of origin, but for the world we share.”


FCNL’s newest program for young adults is the creation of campus chapters in colleges. Many of these campuses are not new to FCNL: their students have participated in past Spring Lobby Weekends.

Four campus chapters were launched last year. Today, there are ten chapters, ranging from Georgia to Indiana to New York.

There are many requests to start chapters on other campuses. FCNL hopes to launch more in the coming summer so students can begin their fall semester with FCNL.

FCNL plans that these chapters will partner with existing Advocacy Teams to lobby their members of Congress together. This was the case at Guilford College and Western Carolina University. After their initial online training, a local member of an Advocacy Team provided them with additional in-person training. Together, they then lobbied members of Congress.

“People who have been oppressed and exploited, who have experienced violence and occupation, will never fail to realize the connections between their struggles.”

“Campus chapters are our way of making sure that we have long-term and consistent advocacy presence in the campuses we already work with,” said Larissa Gil Sanhueza, FCNL’s young adult program director. “We want to lift leaders up to be able to do their own work and train others.” 

Adlai Amor is an FCNL editorial consultant.



Photo by Wesley Pinkham/FCNL

“Every Single Issue is on Fire”

Q&A with Amelia Kegan,
associate general secretary
for policy and advocacy

How has the 119th Congress impacted our advocacy?

Every single issue on our legislative agenda is on fire. This is unique. In previous sessions of Congress only one or two issues would rise to the top and we could focus our resources on them.

Our community has embraced this challenge. We are seeing an outpouring of energy from our advocates. There is an unprecedented growth in constituents lobbying their members of Congress.

The second session of the 119th Congress starts in January 2026. We will persist by strategically working behind the scenes while our advocates organize and lobby their members of Congress.

Now that Congress has re-opened, what bills need to pass before the end of this session?

The appropriations bills for FY26, which began October 1, will have to pass. Congress has until January 30. We’re advocating for these bills to include safeguards so that the administration cannot easily withhold, rescind, or move funds appropriated by Congress.

Congressional appropriators must make it clear that what Congress passes into law must be spent how Congress mandated.

It does not do us any good if Congress comes to a bipartisan agreement and then the administration unilaterally impounds funds or moves a partisan rescissions package.

At the same time, we are working to make sure that no one comes in and plucks the AUMF repeal out or trade it out of the NDAA.

If Congress passes the NDAA with the AUMF repeal provision, this will be a major legislative victory for the FCNL community and other partners who have been advocating for its repeal in the last 20 years. We pray that it will be passed. We must end endless wars.

[Note: This provision was passed and signed into law on December 18, 2025.]

How has the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA or PL 119-21) affected FCNL's priorities for the 119th Congress?

We lobbied hard against this bill, and we are grateful for our community's tireless work in opposing it. We are on the defensive for many of our legislative priorities.

But the bill could have been worse. There are some cuts scheduled for later. This gives us time to push back and potentially mitigate or delay them.

"We saw during the government shutdown what happens when SNAP benefits are cut—churches and private charities can't fill the gap."

Some of the biggest cuts will be to SNAP. States will have to take on more of the administrative costs, and, for the first time in history, cover some of the cost of the benefits. We saw during the government shutdown what happens when SNAP benefits are cut—churches and private charities can't fill the gap. This previews coming SNAP cuts. We should use this experience to lobby our members of Congress.

We need to continue to educate people about OBBBA because many still do not understand the harms in it and what they can do now.

What success have we had so far in the 119th Congress?

Despite our disappointment and opposition to the OBBBA, it does contain a vital extension of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). This overdue victory will provide recognition and compensation to tens of thousands of people who were exposed to radiation from U.S. nuclear weapons program and uranium mining.

We have also seen progress in establishing a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. It passed out of its Senate committee, and the bill is closer than ever to becoming law!

Another big success has been the progress of the repeal of the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF)—which permitted the Iraq war. This was included in the 2026 NDAA, the major military policy bill. We appreciate the leadership of Senators Todd Young (IN), a former marine, and Tim Kaine (VA) who made repealing the Iraq AUMF among their top priorities, along with Representatives Gregory Meeks (NY-5) and Chip Roy (TX-21).

Although the final vote hasn't happened as we are going to press, we're excited about finally closing the door on one of our nation's forever wars.

How are you changing so FCNL's strategic advocacy remains relevant?

We are evolving our advocacy to build local power so advocates can better influence their members of Congress. We are training our

grassroots leaders to be organizers and create coalitions to bring in more partners.

We have also started new programs, like campus chapters at colleges. They pick the issues they work on from our legislative priorities as we continue to build our pipeline of advocates.

Given the flood of concerning news on so many of our priorities, we have to be intentional about who we ask to take action when. We can't call on our entire network all the time for everything.

Although protecting democracy is not a legislative priority, what is FCNL doing to fight growing authoritarianism?

Our friends at the Horizons Project depict authoritarianism as an upside-down triangle that is held up by different institutions. One of those pillars is Congress.

We are pressuring members of Congress not to be complicit with the administration's overreach. We are best positioned to affect Congress, focusing on Congress' role in the constitutional system of checks and balances.

We need to show members of Congress that their constituents do not back militarized immigration raids, dismantling foreign aid, or unconstitutional boat strikes in the Pacific and Caribbean oceans. We also provide members of Congress with cover for pushing back against executive overreach. We need to build broader and stronger coalitions to be successful.

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This year's class of Advocacy Corps organizers gathered for the Washington Summer Intensive training in August 2025. Photo by Tirrea Billings.



Advocacy Corps Adapts to a Changing World

By Kristen Archer

“Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Late Congressman John Lewis, a longtime ally of FCNL, used versions of this quote often, sometimes pairing it with the phrase, “...and help redeem the soul of America.”

This quote is the essence of FCNL’s Advocacy Corps program, which celebrates a decade of organizing this year.

The Advocacy Corps emerged at the urging of FCNL’s governors to engage young adults more fully. “Young people have long been catalysts for change—in both the U.S. government and Quakerism,” said former program manager Katie Breslin. “Centering youth was a very Quaker decision.”

Through a series of consultations, guided by former general secretary Diane Randall, FCNL discerned that communities across the country wanted tools and training to “make some noise” locally and advocate in the manner of FCNL.

In response, FCNL created the Advocacy Corps program in 2015. During the program young adults (ages 19–30) work to mobilize their communities and influence members of Congress for 10 months. In the last decade, nearly 200 young organizers have participated. They host events, lead lobby visits, train others to lobby, and publish letters to the editor, among other engagement activities. In the process, they bring dozens of people from their communities into FCNL’s advocacy work.

“I’m here with the Quakers.”

The young organizers’ journeys do not end after 10 months. Many continue to be active with FCNL. LaVida Davis, director of strategic advocacy, calls it “a natural onramp to continuing advocacy.”

Sergio Mata-Cisneros (AC 2016-17) went on to work as an FCNL summer intern and as a program assistant. Currently, he uses skills honed as a young organizer in his role mobilizing people on hunger issues for a New Mexico food bank.

“The program really got me the opportunity to find my voice—how to speak out, and how to organize and learn these tools of advocacy,” he said. “In these times, it’s about how you come together, build community, and support each other.”

Though not a program requirement, many organizers seeking a spiritual home find one among Friends through their work with FCNL. Even for those who do not, lobbying grounded in Quaker testimonies has other benefits.

Rachel Overstreet (AC 2022-23) is now FCNL’s legislative representative for Native American advocacy. She said that FCNL taught her to use a faith perspective to bridge partisan divides. “As soon as you say, ‘I’m here with the Quakers,’ all the preconceived notions go out the window—and they always ask about oats,” she said.

Trusted Messengers

The Advocacy Corps has proven that young advocates can be leaders. “They’re trusted messengers who can inspire civic engagement and push back against the cynicism that says, ‘there’s nothing I can do,’” said Justin Hurdle, advocacy campaigns and stakeholder engagement manager.

Importantly, young people do not need to be a seasoned advocate to join the Advocacy Corps. Traditionally, FCNL trained organizers to focus on a single

issue, selected based on legislative opportunity, national mobilization potential, and Friends’ priorities.

Past issues have included migration, climate change, and the establishment of a truth and healing commission on Native American boarding schools. Young organizers are recruited from key states and from affected communities.

“There’s no single Advocacy Corps story,” Breslin said. “Organizers bring a wide range of experiences and identities—and that makes the program stronger.”

A decade in, the Advocacy Corps has adapted to the shifting political landscape. While organizers still focus on one primary issue—this year, seeking welcome and safety for immigrant neighbors—the program now offers flexibility to engage on other FCNL priorities that may better resonate with Corps member’s lawmakers.

More Relevant Than Ever

“The Advocacy Corps is more relevant than ever,” said Jim Cason, former associate general secretary for policy and advocacy. “Change won’t start in Washington—it will come from communities across the country, especially those that haven’t had the privilege or political space to engage. That’s where we must build tools, trust, and ties to change the conversation.”

Since change does not happen overnight, milestones—like a lawmaker recognizing FCNL’s advocacy when a new organizer embarks on their first lobby visit—offer motivation to persevere.

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Friends Committee on National Legislation

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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.

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We show Congress the power and integrity of their constituents.

Any thoughts on the final session of the 119th Congress?

Our advocates and their communities have had to deal with a lot this year. Yet, we made it through.

Thank you for all your hard work. Our community responded with strong advocacy, and we are seeing cracks in the wall of congressional complicity.

One of our advocacy principles is always to look at the long game.

We will have midterm elections next year. We need to grow and equip our advocates. We must continue to work with unlikely partners and further build partnerships with those who are harmed by today's injustice.

We are encouraged by our community's increased levels of activism. There is a lot of work to do, and so we must continue to innovate in a difficult environment to build on our work for peace and justice. 🦋

Amelia Kegan is FCNL's Associate General Secretary for Policy and Advocacy. Interview by Adlai Amor, FCNL editorial consultant.

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"I think the success of the Advocacy Corps... is not necessarily that we got a bill passed or that we got legislation signed into law. That happens sometimes, but more of the success is that we made noise. We were heard," said Larissa Gil Sanhueza, FCNL's director of young adult advocacy.

This summer marks five years since Rep. Lewis died. With a lifetime dedicated to public service, civil rights, and democratic participation, he, too, played the long game. FCNL's Advocacy Corps organizers honor his legacy of making noise and getting in good trouble. 🦋

Kristen Archer is an FCNL editorial consultant.



APRIL 11–14, 2026

🦋 Friends Committee on National Legislation

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