



Quaker Voice Maryland

January 2021 Newsletter

• Update from Quaker Voice working group • 2021 legislative priorities • Action items • Advocacy calendar

Who we are: Quaker Voice of Maryland (QVM) connects Maryland Friends to better advocate for state-wide laws and policies. Established in 2019 by Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM), QVM also welcomes Friends from Maryland's three Eastern Shore Quaker meetings that relate to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM).

Learn more! Check out our website (www.quakervoicemd.org) to sign up for our email list and learn about our work.

How do we approach 2021?: After the pandemic-shortened 2020 Md. General Assembly session, QVM organizers held a well-attended June Zoom retreat as to QVM's "Year One." This fall, we sent a survey to individuals and Meetings across the State, from Western Md. to the Eastern Shore, seeking to identify Friends' current priorities. From survey responses, the four top policy areas Friends selected for 2021 are:

1. *Gun Violence Prevention and Peace Building*
2. *Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Reform*
3. *Climate Justice*
4. *Expanding Access to Health Care*

QVM's core group subsequently met (virtually) several times to consider possible 2021 bills focused on these four areas and to recommend how Friends most effectively might collectively make our voices heard.

The group urges Friends to:

- Support, again, a few 2020 bills interrupted by the pandemic-break,
- Support an override of Governor Hogan's 2020 veto of the important Kirwan-Commission education bill ("*Blueprint for Maryland's Future*"), and
- Embrace important new 2021 bills for justice in Maryland's policies as to police, climate and health care.

QVM will call on Friends to share resources and to support efforts of other groups and advocates who share our Light and priorities.

More specific 2021 information follows:

Quaker Voice of Maryland – 2021 Legislative Priorities

1. Gun Violence Prevention & Peace Building

VETO OVERRIDE of Blueprint for Maryland's Future ([House Bill 1300 in 2020](#))

Friends join Strong Schools MD, MAJR, ACLU, and others to advocate for **funding to help end Maryland's "school-to-prison-pipeline"** with better schools in poor communities, alternatives to expulsion, and vocational training of at-risk students. The Governor's budget-related veto was NOT called for as the bill itself contains a safety-valve to delay its effective date in any year when budget revenues have fallen by 7.5% or more. Click here for [detailed information about the bill](#). **Veto override votes may occur early during the Session, which begins 1/13/21, so we encourage you to take the take action on this bill – more info on how is listed in the Action Items below!**

POLICY AREA: Criminal Justice & Prison Reform

Police Use of Force and Accountability. Because so many bills are expected on these issues, QVM will not initially recommend a bill, but we encourage Friends in January 2021 to join us along with ACLU and other advocates to contact our legislators in support of 5 basic principles. **More information:** <https://bit.ly/2XlkVSm>.

Credits for Correctional Education Milestones (HB 89 / SB --). Continued from 2020 when it passed the Senate and ran out of time in the House, this recognizes the scientific evidence that prison education is one of the strongest factors to reduce recidivism. This bill would direct Maryland prisons to restore incentives for incarcerated Marylanders to earn major educational milestones such as GEDs, college degrees or vocational certificates for good employment. MAJR will offer action alerts for easy email to legislators.

More information: <https://bit.ly/3bnWrjw>

Correctional Services – Step–Down Programs – Cause of Action (HB131/ SB--). This bill requires that individuals in solitary confinement receive transition services to begin 6 months before they are released directly to the public, reversing a practice that creates a public safety threat.

More information: Stay tuned!

Maryland Correctional Ombuds Act (Bill #TBD). A new, 2021 bill from Quaker-founded Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR- www.ma4jr.org), an Ombuds would apply a system that works well in 14 sister states to provide independent oversight of prison operations, public reporting on prison conditions, and recommendations for improvement. The need for such oversight has been demonstrated by the COVID-infection rate in Md. prisons more than twice that of comparably-sized populations. Also, Ombuds settlement by mediation will be explored that could save excessive taxpayer costs for cumbersome 4-layer inmate grievance process.

More information: <https://bit.ly/3bmVTdC>

POLICY AREA: Climate Justice

Climate Solutions Now Bill (Bill #TBD). This legislation would change Maryland law so that our state would be required to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions 60% by 2030 and be net zero by 2045. It will also require a percentage of all state funds spent on climate change to go to underserved, frontline communities, create a working group to protect fossil fuel workers, and enacts a series of policies that will reduce emissions immediately.

More information: <https://bit.ly/35qjQNk>

POLICY AREA: Expanding access to healthcare

Maryland Health Equity Resource Communities Act (Bill #TBD). This new 2021 bill would revive a system shown effective between 2011 and 2016 by increasing the state alcohol beverage sales tax by one cent per dollar both to reduce alcohol overuse, and using funds raised to create more community-based prevention, treatment, and recovery support programs to address substance use and mental health disorders.

More information: <http://healthcareforall.com/get-involved/equitycommunities/>

Action Items

These are actions you can take before the General Assembly convenes on Jan. 13th to show support for our priorities!

 <p>Email your legislator that you want them to override the governor's veto!</p> <p>Action link: https://marylandblueprint.org/</p>	 <p>Sign the ACLU petition to demand impactful police reform in MD!</p> <p>Action link: https://bit.ly/3hX68Xm</p>	 <p>Sign the CCAN petition to say you support Climate Solutions Now!</p> <p>Action link: https://bit.ly/3bsL2iB</p>
--	--	---

Advocacy Calendar – Friends Advocating with F/friends

Similar to last year, Quaker Voice plans to partner with organizations that are the lead organizers for our priority legislation and we will be inviting Friends to join us as part of different advocating activities and events. This year we will be partnering with the following groups:

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Maryland
- Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN)
- Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR)
- Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR)
- Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability
- Maryland Healthcare for All
- Strong Schools Maryland

Current calendar includes:

Week of 2/22/21 - Advocacy week for Climate Solutions Now bill w/ CCAN

If you are interested in joining us for advocacy updates, activities, and events please join our email list and check out the event calendar on our website (<https://www.quakervoicemd.org/legislative-session>). You can also contact Quaker Voice directly at quakervoicemd@gmail.com.



*Thanks for reading and we look forward to acting together
to bring Light to the General Assembly in 2021!*