

Dear NYM Friends,

At our recent Fall Interim Session, the NYM body approved a proposal from the Anti-racism Working Group to write letters on behalf of NYM in support of a bill which would create a Native Boarding School Truth and Healing Commission. The clerks are sending letters on behalf of NYM to MN and WI Senators and their Representatives. Since only constituents have standing to submit letters to Congresspeople, reaching out to more representatives and senators -- and getting more letters to each of them -- must be the work of other NYM members. Below we offer instructions for writing, and sample letters. Please help NYM support this important legislation!

Legislation for a Native Boarding School Truth and Healing Commission -- 4 sample letters from NYM

- Letter to non-supporting/non-co-sponsoring senator asking for support
- Letter to co-sponsor senator thanking for support
- Letter to non-supporting/non-co-sponsoring representative asking for support
- Letter to co-sponsor representative thanking for support

Instructions for NYM Friends:

- For more information: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission/>
- By all means personalize your letter, or write an entirely new one! Send a letter as an individual, or better yet, get your Meeting or Worship Group to sign on as a body.
- You are writing on your own behalf or that of your Meeting or Worship Group, not NYM, so your first sentence and closing will be different. Be sure to include the right state if you mention that you are part of NYM (if you live in MN, you might mention that about half of our congregations are in MN.)
- Do make sure you state the legislation you support in the first paragraph of your letter, using both the number and name of the bill.
- The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) has a web page which gives a synopsis of the bill and includes a template which makes it very easy for each of us to send an email to our two Senators and our Representative. Go to <https://fcnl.quorum.us/campaign/35660/> .
- Or submit your letter through the website of your congressperson. If you use some version of the sample letter here and it is too long for a website, consider deleting the last substantive paragraph.
- We know that the following legislators from WI and MN are co-sponsors of the bill: WI Senator Tammy Baldwin, MN Senator Amy Klobuchar, MN Senator Tina Smith.
- Consider sending a letter to the editor of your paper naming your senator or representative by name, either thanking them for co-sponsoring the bill or explaining why they should take action. Many congresspeople have clipping services that will alert them whenever they appear in the press. Knowing they have been publicly thanked or asked for something increases the impact of your letter.

NYM letter to WI senator Ron Johnson asking him to co-sponsor or support S2907

Dear Senator Johnson,

I am writing on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting, a Quaker organization of about 30 congregations, about half of which are in Wisconsin. We are united as a body in asking you to cosponsor or support S2907, which will create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. This bill complements the Department of the Interior's *Federal Indian School Truth Initiative*, announced in June of 2021.

As one of the denominations responsible for running Indian Boarding Schools, we are complicit in the great harms that were done. We are in the process of informing ourselves of the 30-odd schools run by Quakers, but there were hundreds run by other faith communities throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. All merit investigation and disclosure.

We believe the Truth and Healing Commission is a crucial step for the federal government to take.

The Commission would establish the facts of what happened. It would have the authority to obtain information from a variety of agencies and religious bodies across the nation wherever there were Indian boarding schools. Only a federal effort will have the necessary authority, scope, and resources to do the job justice. Importantly, Native Peoples are asking that this step be taken; they have worked tirelessly over many years to bring this Commission to life.

The Commission is time-urgent. The last remaining survivors of the boarding schools are quite elderly. Now is our last chance to learn from them directly about their experiences. This is also a last chance to honor their voices and their stories, and to offer them the dignity of being heard by an official Commission of the federal government.

Given what we now understand about generational trauma, the sooner we can begin the work of this Commission, the sooner healing can begin. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) regards the creation of this Commission as an important first step toward the truth-seeking and healing processes that must occur.

There are several successful models of this sort of effort. Canada went through a similar process some years ago regarding its own Indian boarding schools. South Africa did as well after the end of Apartheid. Only when the truth is uncovered and acknowledged can the parties find their way to mutual understanding and possible reconciliation. Without an honest accounting, neither healing nor reconciliation are likely to occur.

Please join your colleagues in supporting this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Katherine Griffith on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(addresses)

NYM letter to WI senator Tammy Baldwin thanking her for co-sponsoring S2907

Dear Senator Baldwin,

I am writing on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting, a Quaker organization of about 30 congregations, about half of which are in Wisconsin. **We are united as a body in thanking you for cosponsoring S2907 to create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools.**

As one of the denominations responsible for running Indian Boarding Schools, we are complicit in the great harms that were done. We are in the process of informing ourselves of the 30-odd schools run by Quakers, but there were hundreds run by other faith communities throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. All merit investigation and disclosure.

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Thank you again for co-sponsoring this important legislation, and working with your colleagues to get as many co-sponsors as possible.

Sincerely,

Katherine Griffith on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(addresses)

NYM letter to WI Representative Grothman asking him to co-sponsor or support HR5444

Dear Representative Grothman,

I am writing on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting, a Quaker organization of about 30 congregations, about half of which are in Wisconsin. We are united as a body in asking you to cosponsor or support HR5444, which will create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. This bill complements the Department of the Interior's *Federal Indian School Truth Initiative*, announced in June of 2021.

As one of the denominations responsible for running Indian Boarding Schools, we are complicit in the great harms that were done. We are in the process of informing ourselves of the 30-odd schools run by Quakers, but there were hundreds run by other faith communities throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. All merit investigation and disclosure.

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Please join your colleagues in supporting this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Katherine Griffith on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(addresses)

Letter to state Representative thanking them for supporting HR5444

Dear Representative __,

I am writing on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting, a Quaker organization of about 30 congregations, about half of which are in Wisconsin. **We are united as a body in thanking you for cosponsoring HR5444 to create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools.**

As one of the denominations responsible for running Indian Boarding Schools, we are complicit in the great harms that were done. We are in the process of informing ourselves of the 30-odd schools run by Quakers, but there were hundreds run by other faith communities throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. All merit investigation and disclosure.

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Katherine Griffith on behalf of Northern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(addresses)

ARWG proposal: A proposal for NYM to send letters of support to Congressional delegations of the Upper Midwest

The Issue: On September 30, 2021, a bill was introduced in Congress for the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the U.S. Act. This bill, along with the Department of the Interior's Federal Indian School Truth Initiative announced in June, 2021, signals that some in the federal government are finally ready to acknowledge the devastating consequences of the assimilative boarding school era and begin to address the ongoing intergenerational impacts of the boarding school policies. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) urges all members of Congress to support this legislation as a first step towards the truth and healing process.

The bipartisan legislation (S. 2907/H.R. 5444), introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (MA), Rep. Sharice Davids (KS-3), and Rep. Tom Cole (OK-4), would establish the first formal commission in United States history on Indian boarding schools. The commission would investigate and document policies, assimilation practices, attempted termination of cultures and languages of Indigenous peoples, and human rights violations that took place at hundreds of faith-run institutions.

The work to introduce a congressional commission has been underway for almost a decade. NABS submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2016 seeking information on the number of boarding schools that operated in the U.S., how many children attended these schools, how many children died or went missing, and additional facts related to the operation of the schools. However, these questions were never answered. Since then, NABS has been conducting this research independently.

Why NYM?

- Northern Yearly Meeting has embraced the responsibility of building right relationship with Native communities and peoples.
- We remind ourselves that the reason for NYM to take up the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD) and to consider renouncing a 500-year-old doctrine was that it was an entry point into understanding contemporary realities. When Native groups asked faith communities to do this work around the DoD, it was to help us understand and reject the philosophical foundation of much of our jurisprudence related to Native Americans, and to enable us to show up on the issues of our day.
- Quakers were complicit. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Christian churches collaborated with the government to create hundreds of boarding schools for Native American children. The conditions at these schools, more than 30 of them run by Quakers, were unspeakable. It is vital to ground our advocacy efforts in an honest history of Quakers' oppression of Indigenous people.
- NYM's Doctrine of Discovery Committee agrees that this issue is significant and worthy of our attention. We will have the broadest impact when NYM, the monthly meetings and worship

groups, and individual Meeting members, all exercise our voices and communicate with the Senators and Representatives of each of the states where NYM members reside.

Why Now?

- NABS is asking for public support. The movement for boarding school healing has gained an international groundswell this year and we are now in an era of truth and healing, according to Ruth Anna Buffalo, the Board president of NABS.

- We have a limited amount of time to hear directly from survivors and to record their stories. A Congressional Commission is needed to locate and analyze the records from the 367 known Indian boarding schools that operated in the United States. A commission would also bring together boarding school survivors with a broad cross-section of Tribal representatives and experts in education, health, and children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of removing Indian children from their families and communities.

The Proposed Action:

As people of faith, and as people from a faith tradition directly involved in supporting and running Native American boarding schools, we call on Congress to create some momentum and legitimacy in the hearts of many American citizens for the truth and healing process. We propose that NYM send letters in support of the legislation to the Congressional delegations of States in which NYM constituent groups reside. We also encourage Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual members of our community to contact their senators and representatives in the U.S. Congress to support, or even co-sponsor, the bill.

For more information: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission/>

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) has a webpage which gives a synopsis of the bill and includes a template which makes it very easy for each of us to send an email to our two Senators and our Representative. Go to <https://fcnl.quorum.us/campaign/35660/>.