

News from the Friends Committee on North Carolina Legislation (FCNCL) February 2022

We did it in 2021! It's been a busy first year of the NC General Assembly 2021-2022 legislative session. The policy committee issued action alerts for five bills - all of which were selected for the significant impact these could have on promoting racial equity in North Carolina in addition to our Legislative Priorities.

Two of these bills (both of which contribute to our Legislative Priority of Environmental Protection) survived the crossover from one house to another in May 2021: **Heirs property model legislation and Reducing allowable PFAS levels**. The bills currently reside in the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Rules Committees, respectively. Policy committee members have been busy tracking down information about the progress and vulnerability of these bills; now, their focus will turn to additional advocacy.

To prepare for this phase, the January 2022 Advocacy workshop focused on how bills get passed in the general assembly, the details of these bills, and how members might further advocate for the passage of these two bills. Zoom meetings with relevant legislators and interested FCNCL workshop participants will be set up soon to discuss how these bills might move forward. Anyone who missed the workshop but wishes to participate in zoom meetings with relevant legislators could contact us through our email (info@fcncl.org).

Read on for a brief summary of the fate of our other action alerts:

Closing the health care coverage gap. No movement has occurred on this issue, but it remains on the table in the General Assembly, thanks to Governor Cooper. He requested, as part of the budget negotiations, that a Senate and House committee of Republicans find a way to move this forward. Senate Republicans, particularly from the western part of the state, may be open to receiving federal dollars to expand medicaid coverage, but Republicans in the House are resisting this idea. ***For those of you who live in counties represented by Republican Representatives, additional letters about this issue may have some influence (See Fact sheet on Closing the Coverage Gap for help).***

Eliminating cash bail for low level misdemeanors. The Governor's Task Force on Racial Equity in the Criminal Justice system had recommended that cash bail be eliminated for class I, II, and III misdemeanors that posed no risk to public safety. Our action alert asked members to advocate for the passage of House Bill 210 out of the House Rules Committee, but it languished there, and did not crossover to the Senate in May. However, a model policy for localities is in development to address pretrial release and accountability practices, such as setting bail. ***So, this may be addressed eventually through altered judicial policy or through state policy changes by the administrative office of the courts rather than through legislation, but unlikely to be addressed through legislation this session.*** This spring, the Orange County Bail Bond Justice Organization (<https://ocbailbondjustice.org/>), a partnership of faith-based communities in Orange County and justice organizations, is planning to sponsor a District Attorney Candidate Forum that will focus on what DAs are doing and plan to do around changing patterns of setting bail. More information about dates will follow.

Raising the threshold age for entering the juvenile justice system. The State Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice (TREC) recommended that the minimum age of jurisdiction should be raised to 12; House Bill 261 proposed that the minimum age be raised from 6 to 10, and provide guidance for evaluating the capacity for criminal action among 10-11 year olds. We asked members to ask that House Bill 261 be heard and voted on by committee. *A similar bill in the Senate (S207), however, did raise the minimum age to 10, and this was ratified and became law. TREC rated raising the minimum age as a "partial success" as the recommendation was to raise the age to 12.*

"Activating Advocacy: How to Lobby the NCGA... This Year." In January, the Strategic Advocacy and Education (SAE) committee in conjunction with the Policy Committee presented "Activating Advocacy: How to Lobby the NCGA... This Year," a well-received workshop coinciding with the return of legislators to the state capital and in anticipation of the start of the short session of the North Carolina General Assembly. The presenters discussed effective ways to connect with legislators, focusing specifically on two bills that considered forever chemicals (PFAS) and the partition of heirs' property. Participants were invited to join lobby visits with FCNCL members in the weeks after the workshop.

As FCNCL remains in communication with folks engaged with the policy process, we have come to understand that this year's short session may not begin until May, with legislators still focused on ending the long session begun last year. Given this update, we are determining where we can be most impactful with our lobby visits and will be reaching out to interested participants when that is decided.

The workshop is a step toward FCNCL's goal of expanding our mission to include both legislation and relationship building with North Carolina legislators. This means educating them and building influence with them over time in our priority topic areas. With the General Assembly making dangerous decisions that will hurt the most vulnerable among us, it's urgent that we amplify our efforts and build our collective power.

TREC. FYI - the Governor's task force on racial equity in the criminal justice system (TREC) has issued an interim report and chart: <https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TREC-Interim-Report.pdf>. A related link is <https://wcsj.law.duke.edu/> page which is loaded with relevant criminal justice info for NC; also, check out their event page - youtube on plea bargaining; discussion on death penalty by author of book on men on death row, etc.

Visit Our Website – fcnc.org. Our website is a work in progress. It was updated and reorganized in November, deleting duplicate pages and adding Year in Review and Engage With Us pages. We strengthened our Action Center by adding more templates for contacting your legislators and handouts to inform them about our organization. The website contains much valuable information that has been extended over the past year, including our newsletters, archived Action Alerts, Fact Sheets, and our revised Racial Justice/Antiracism Statement. Going forward, the website will have information about our Priorities Discernment process added for 2022.

We also have two Facebook pages, but these are no longer actively maintained. And we do not yet have a presence on Instagram and Twitter. The Communications Committee is seeking

volunteers who will coordinate our social media and help us reach more Friends to join our advocacy efforts.

We will be busy over the new months. In March 2022, the Policy Committee will pivot towards discerning priorities for the next legislative session starting in 2023. Meetings will be asked to begin their process of discerning those areas which are most important for them. The Policy Committee will meet to review these and make recommendations for the next set of priorities; these will be reviewed by the FCNCL Executive Committee, and a draft version will be proposed to the General Committee for approval in October of 2022.

Take Action by helping to educate each other. If you have an area of expertise or information about a specific area related to one of our [Policy Priorities](#), consider sharing a draft Fact Sheet to share with the Policy Committee that might be put on our website to share with others. Let us know about your potential interest at info@fcncl.org.

From the FCNCL Nominating Committee. Friends, we are seeking help from you in filling two positions. We hope that some of you are able to step forward or that you might recommend someone from your meeting who would be interested in filling one of these positions.

1 - Treasurer: We seek a Friend who is committed to the work of FCNCL and who has skills and experience in electronic banking and in the use of spreadsheets to manage the accounting process. This person may begin now as Assistant Treasurer and move into the Treasurer's position later this year. Serving in these positions includes membership on the FCNCL Executive Committee.

2 - Communications Committee Member: We seek a Friend who is committed to the work of FCNCL and who has skills and experience in using social media -- Facebook and perhaps others. That person could begin participating on Communications Committee as soon as they have been approved by the Executive Committee.

Interested Friends should contact one of the co-clerks of the Nominating Committee.

Marian Beane -- marian.beane@gmail.com

Dorothy Mason -- hmason@triad.rr.com

Learn More About FCNCL. Quakers have a long history of letting their lives speak in the political arena to bring a voice of conscience. FCNCL aims to build on that legacy. We advocate for NC policies that support people of all cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds; marriage and gender equality; violence prevention; civil and voting rights for all citizens; access to quality education opportunities; quality healthcare for all; an equitable and humane criminal justice system; environmental stewardship; and opposition to all forms of torture and extreme rendition.

Learn more about the organization and sign up for action alerts at the [FCNCL website](#). Encourage your meeting to appoint representatives if they have not done so. Plan to attend a workshop. Ponder the queries raised in our Annual Meeting discernment. We hope you'll feel led to join us.

Gratitude. We would like to give a shout out of thanks to the Monthly Meetings, Yearly Meetings, and individuals who contributed financially to FCNCL and to all the volunteers and participants that made this such a successful year for FCNCL. Our budget is small but necessary and your gifts of time and money make it all possible.