

## Northeast Union Statement and Alternative Proposal

Respectfully and understanding the gravity of this request, we are asking the board to pause and consider a space that would allow for alternatives, of which there are an abundance, to emerge and develop. This pause is significant because it would bridge the transition of leadership in the General Secretary's Office allowing the incoming General Secretary to shape the "composite program portfolio."

As a union, we offer the following alternative proposal to address organization-wide cuts to programming and staff. Our right and responsibility to submit this proposal is included in our collective bargaining agreement. The union notes that while the charge of the Ad Hoc Working Group was "to recommend a composite program portfolio to the Board," layoffs were ordered based on the Working Group's recommendation before the Board met and before the Union had an opportunity to present alternatives. We see this as a violation of AFSC process, as well as a violation of both the spirit and the letter of our collective bargaining agreement with AFSC.

We understand that termination letters have already been sent to at least two union members. In order to uphold good process and again understanding the complexity of this request, we are asking that these letters of termination be rescinded until the Union proposal can be fully considered.

We offer this alternative proposal because we are deeply distressed that financial mismanagement has put the AFSC in a position where leadership has concluded that there was no alternative to widespread layoffs of staff and the closure of programs—some of which have been in existence for more than five decades. Our own analysis, as early as 2015, indicated that AFSC was dipping dangerously into its reserves.

We are concerned that the decision-making process includes those most directly responsible for the current crisis. Taking responsibility for these errors means going the extra mile to seek ways to continue programs that are proposed for cutting. We urge the board consider an alternative process for mitigating the situation we are in. Going forward it is crucial that fiscal transparency is coupled with meaningful accountability practices, policies, and procedures that are necessary in any organization where program impacts the life and well-being of many oppressed communities.

The approach we outline protects us from an approach remedy a problem by causing harm somewhere else. We as a union are raising these concerns not so the cuts are adjusted and redistributed throughout the organization, but so that we make immediate space to acknowledge that there are multiple solutions that haven't even been considered. We are focused on undoing not redistributing harm. We are collectively capable of developing cooperative measures that don't automatically result in loss of program, institutional memory, and the staff that are honestly our deepest resource.

As the path to “streamlining the organization” is chartered, there is little evidencing the engagement of the communities we’ve been welcomed into, trusted by, and relied upon. The impacts of laying down programs on these communities, especially with such abrupt and short notice must be central in current deliberations and impending decisions. If this process is to be done with integrity, then governance and leadership must hear from and listen to Ms. Bennet in Cambridge as she imagines not being able to afford a coat next winter or the community members experiencing homelessness who rely upon AFSC to support and advocate alongside them and on their behalf in coalitions throughout Greater Boston for safe and dignified shelter, long-term solutions to homelessness, and increased affordable housing and displacement prevention to stabilize diverse communities (MAAP Program); 6 municipalities who are developing Sanctuary ordinances are losing support, including Springfield, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in Massachusetts (Western Mass Program); the Providence immigrant community as it loses AFSC’s supportive presence in protecting the city’s immigrant residents (SENE Program); and, the removal of intergenerational, whole community healing resources from Indigenous People throughout the Northeast (The Center for Community Healing, Healing Justice New England).

The Union is offering the following alternative proposal as a way to create the space to allow for new process and more seasoned decisions. Additionally, staff are offering a proposal that outlines how this process could be developed attending to decolonizing and anti-racist principles; *Attending to Anti-racist and Decolonizing Principles: A Process Proposal* which will come under separate cover. Here, the Union offers a set of strategies, options, and cost-cutting initiatives that can be used over a 6-month period that allow us to step back and be circumspect.

- **Reallocation of Endowment:** given the extent of crisis globally and in the U.S. explore the reallocation of endowment funds for operations.
- **Fundraising strategy:** fundraising should always be rooted in program work and development staff should visit local programs. We recommend a full assessment of development strategy while implementing these practices:
  - Remove restrictions on program-based fundraising which will allow regions and local programs to fundraise directly.
  - Implement a fundraising plan to close the financial gap that includes garnering funds to protect a program from being cut.
  - Talk to our donors about our methodology. Launch a development initiative that focuses on the way that AFSC has done its work through the frameworks of power-sharing and self-determination. Ask people to invest into an AFSC methodology that puts the “wind under the wings.” Acknowledge that AFSC can’t own those outcomes and that’s a good thing. We aren’t trying to privilege the AFSC voice, but we’re asking Quakers and others to invest in AFSC’s approach, creating a global-wide campaign.
  - Support local staff to develop relationships with local donors.

- **Staffing:** We recommend options that would prevent the remedy of a problem by causing harm somewhere else the zero sum thinking, options that would support the retention of institutional memory and the valuable staff who are AFSC best resource.
  - Offer optional early retirement the provisions of which would be subject to collective bargaining.
  - Give staff the opportunity to reduce their hours to part-time for a 6-month period without compromising a return to full time status or the status of the program they serve.
  - Offer current staff first assignment to open positions
  - Decrease our reliance on contractors through an organization-wide staff skills assessment and development of a skills bank that AFSC can use in staff reassignment.
  - Generate criteria and queries for program expansion that assess the impact of hiring new staff on existing programs.
  - In the event that a program is not included in the “composite program portfolio” staff and committee should be given the support and resources to go through a real and fully resourced discernment process. This would require the development of a discernment policy that is consistent with decolonized and anti-racist principles.
  
- **Cost-cutting Measures:** We have listed some examples of areas where AFSC could cut costs in order to create space to explore alternatives to program reduction, but all of these recommendations should be seasoned by an Ad Hoc committee in a real consultative process
  - Hiring freeze on nonessential new staff hires.
  - Take a hard look at consultant contracts – use existing staff rather than consultants.
  - Reassign consultant gigs internally.
  - Develop a virtual meeting platform.
  - Moratorium on face-to-face meetings.
  - Encouraging programs to identify program expense reductions.

We thank the Board of the American Friends Service Committee for the attention that you bring to reading and considering this alternative proposal. We acknowledge that everyone is trying to do their best. Against all odds, this process can be a platform for healing and reinvigoration of the work that is so desperately needed.