

A Proposal to resolve the current conflict at Brooklyn Friends School
over the establishment of the BFS Colleagues Union.

In the firm conviction that the current conflict must be resolved through care and consideration from all sides and stakeholders, we offer a proposal that we believe harmonizes with Quaker process, Quaker values, and the urgent need to hear all voices. We have arrived at this proposal through discernment together in the hope that it can provide way forward. We believe that these recommendations require that all sides both give and gain, in mutual commitment to BFS's vibrant, enduring future. In making this proposal, we hope that it offers a pathway to strengthening the school's Quaker mission and identity. Indeed, we hope that Brooklyn Friends could serve as a model for Quaker schools nationwide.

Our proposal addresses our understanding that the Quaker spirit of the school's union negotiations have broken down over the past year. To repair and strengthen that spirit, we propose that each constituency thoughtfully reconsider its current demands in order to find unity.

We ask the BFS Leadership (Trustees and administration) to commit to the following:

- To recognize the right of BFS teachers and staff to form a union to engage in collective bargaining and all standard union practices, and to rescind their Petition to the National Labor Relations Board.

We ask the BFS Colleagues to commit to the following:

- To work affirmatively and proactively to ensure that parents, students, and community members who mobilized in support of the BFS union move forward with care for, and commitment to, the wellbeing of Brooklyn Friends School, mindful of the importance of turning away from past conflicts in order to restore respectful relationships among all parties.

We ask the BFS Leadership (Trustees and administration), and the BFS Colleagues, to commit to the following:

- To craft a joint statement, expressing specific commitments in moving forward to overcome this crisis and work together in a spirit of care for the BFS community;
- To establish a schedule of joint labor-management meetings, run using Quaker process, with a spirit of openness and transparent communication in order to deepen shared interests and to resolve disputes and challenges.

We believe that responsible employers can and should find paths to achieving shared goals and centering their values while elevating the voices of employees, both through union representation (should the employees choose to be unionized) and through ongoing clear, open communication. To that end, we ask both BFS Leadership and Colleagues to commit to an ongoing joint process to affirm a commitment to working to achieve shared interests, open communication, and an inclusive, positive relationship between the BFS Colleagues and BFS Leadership.

Having consulted with Friends familiar with both Quaker process and labor-management relations, we believe that there are several potentially fruitful options for moving beyond this painful situation, agreeing to an initial collective bargaining agreement, and establishing productive and fair relationships between management and staff at BFS. We ask that both school Leadership and the BFS Colleagues will make a commitment to one or more of the following approaches:

1. Mediation in order to achieve a first contract. There are many exceptional mediators available who can work collaboratively to help complete this initial negotiating process.

2. Joint training in interest-based bargaining in order to move from taking fixed positions, which can be adversarial and detrimental to collaboration, to identifying and supporting shared interests.
3. Consideration of a labor-management partnership. This approach requires mutual work and joint committees throughout the organization, to make sure that issues are identified early, communication is deep and frequent, and all stakeholders are participating in solving problems when and where they emerge. There are thoughtful and expert facilitators and consultants available who could guide this process.

We have consulted with Rebecca Givan, a faculty member in Labor Studies at Rutgers University with deep roots in the Brooklyn Quaker community, on these proposals. She would be willing to work on establishing a new working process that centers Quaker process and prioritizes moving forward with care and concern for the well being of our community. Paul Clark, Director of the School of Labor and Employment Relations at Penn State and a long time member of State College Friends Meeting, would also be willing to provide support in this process. There are also individuals within the broader Quaker community with expertise in conflict resolution and use of Quaker process who could be resources.

We offer to participate in all meetings between the two sides of this dispute as elder or clerk in the hope and expectation of the observation of Quaker process, adherence to Quaker principles and the loving resolution of this conflict. In so doing, we believe we can simultaneously protect the rights of BFS's workers to have a collective voice governed and guaranteed by the NLRB, while also greatly lessening the need to turn to the NLRB, just as Friends Seminary's history would attest.

We respectfully and tenderly offer this proposal for your discernment, in the spirit of the deep love we all share for our school, along with our faith in one another and the Light that connects us all. As a first step, we ask for separate meetings between ourselves and BFS Leadership, and also between ourselves and BFS Colleagues, to identify concerns as well as possible strategies to begin the essential work of healing. We send this letter out to the broader community as well – Quakers, current and former families and students, and all who know and love Brooklyn Friends School – so that all can participate by laying down the existing conflict, and holding this process in the Light.

Nancy Black, Brooklyn Meeting Member, former clerk of the BFS Board of Trustees

Alice Pope, Brooklyn Meeting Member, former clerk of the BFS Board of Trustees

Benjamin Warnke, Brooklyn Meeting Member, former clerk of the BFS Board of Trustees