

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you in good spirits and united in our shared commitment to fostering a world rooted in peace and social justice. Today, I write to you with an urgent message regarding the ongoing impact of mean-spirited rhetoric being propagated by prominent figures, and the concerns about the current administration and the harmful policies and actions that will gravely impact the communities we serve.

In recent years, we have witnessed a troubling trend of divisive speech that undermines the very values we stand for. Speeches that often employ inflammatory language, dismissive attitudes, and a blatant disregard for the dignity of individuals from marginalized communities. These tactics not only sow discord but also embolden hate and intolerance, fostering an environment where division is preferred over unity.



The word that comes to mind for me as we prepare and organize against what we believe to be an assault on the rights and protections we have today is *sanctuary*.

Above: The Northeast Regional Executive Committee demonstrates in front of the United Nations in New York, NY.

The concept of sanctuary itself has been part of human cultures for thousands of years. The idea that persecuted persons should be given a place of refuge is ancient, perhaps even primordial, deriving itself from basic features of human altruism in almost all major religious traditions and in a variety of diverse geographies. “Cities of refuge” as described by the Book of Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, as well as the Bedouin idea of *nazaala*, or the “taking of refuge”, indicate a strong tradition of sanctuary in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In the Americas, many native tribes shared similar practices, particularly in the face of invading European powers. Despite tensions between groups, many tribes still offered and received sanctuary, taking in those who had fled their tribal lands or feared persecution by the Spanish, English, and French.

I urge you to join forces with us and other like-minded allies in our efforts to provide sanctuary and refuge opportunities for our most vulnerable communities and individuals. Let us amplify our voices in promoting messages that lift up instead of tear down. It is crucial to engage in dialogue that encourages understanding, compassion, and constructive discourse and local community actions. Together, we can promote initiatives that educate our communities about the ramifications of divisive speech and harmful policies and take actions to advocate for a more respectful, caring and compassionate climate.

As partners in this vital cause, we have the responsibility to take action and advocate for a brighter future—one where respect triumphs over aggression, and diversity is celebrated rather than scorned. Let us stand strong in our commitment to love, understanding, and social justice for all.

Keith Harvey
Director, [AFSC Northeast Region](#)

Wabanaki Program

Passamaquoddy leader and AFSC Program Coordinator Maggie Dana has guided an in-depth and true community-led listening and dialogue effort to hear from the five local Wabanaki communities about the issues that matter to them, and the systems change work that AFSC could support. The outreach has been grounded in indigenous listening and dialogue practices that have provided broad and meaningful community input around the issues and systems that the communities want to change. They have come together as Waponahkiyik to discern how they can heal themselves and their communities and have reached consensus that the work could be carried, in a heart-centered way, within three baskets (pictured below) containing the restoration of their languages, ceremonies, and healing practices. Bringing back Indigenous languages supports the essence of their culture and society, and will help heal the trauma, or “linguicide,” caused by language being taken away from communities. This healing process will foster resilient communities, rebuild indigenous governance structures, and create space for local change makers so that they are positioned to push back against the state and nonstate actors that have caused so much harm and advocate for systemic change.



New Jersey Immigrant Rights Program

Having expert legal representation can make all the difference for immigrants seeking to stay in the U.S. Over the past year, we assisted more than 2,400 immigrants, including people in detention, asylum seekers, youth, DACA and TPS holders, survivors of domestic violence and other crimes, and many others hoping to obtain an immigration status that will allow them to live with their families and in their communities without fear of deportation. We've also continued to find innovative ways to support our community members and fill the access to justice gap when full representation for so many remains out of reach. Our pro se initiatives helped 35 asylum seekers file their applications before the crucial one-year deadline. In Red Bank, we organized DACA renewal and advance parole clinics to support our DACAmended community members.

Our social workers helped clients with urgent needs, including accessing public benefits, shelter, food, and other resources. Over the past year, IRP's social work team has supported over 200 clients to enroll in various community resources and public benefit programs and worked closely with members of the legal team to advocate for clients before state and federal agencies, all the while providing emotional support and crisis counseling, safety planning, letters of support, and referrals.

And we conducted 28 in-person and virtual immigration-related presentations at schools, churches, community groups, social services providers, conferences, and via webinars organized by national and local partners that reached more than 5,400 immigrants, allies, students, advocates, and social service providers.

We continued organizing with immigrant communities, including youth, women, and Black immigrants, and ensured that there were spaces for leadership development, collective action, and advocacy that addressed their unique needs and amplified their voices. We were successful in advocating for the passage of several state laws that will make New Jersey more welcoming for immigrant communities, including a Language Access Law and a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. In addition, we have led and coordinated budget advocacy efforts to secure continued state funding for free, expert legal representation for low-income individuals in detention, those facing deportation, and unaccompanied immigrant children in New Jersey.

The second Trump administration represents a serious threat for immigrant communities in New Jersey. We are working with and supporting those communities to protect them from expansion of and increase of immigration detention in the state and mass deportations. In the face of these many challenges, the work of the Immigrant Rights Program is critically important. The need for legal representation is even more urgent than ever, as is vital information about the rights of immigrants in their interactions with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), while of course organizing and advocacy to demand protections for NJ's immigrant communities and for a NJ that is welcoming to all.



Above left: NJIRP led a delegation of 23 youth to Washington, D.C., where they received extensive lobby training, attended a career fair and participated in various skill-up organizing and advocacy workshops.

Above right: NJIRP know your rights training in Newark, NJ.

New Hampshire Program

Our work for immigrant justice in New Hampshire is robust and multi-faceted, including our monthly convening of the NH Immigrant Rights Network, a statewide network advocating for humane immigration policies at the federal, state, and local levels; our co-leadership of the NH Immigrant Visitation Program at the Strafford County jail in Dover, NH (in partnership with the NH Conference of the United Church of Christ Immigrant and Refugee Support Group); our active support for faith communities and regional networks providing sanctuary, solidarity, and accompaniment for undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers living in New Hampshire; and our organizing among Black and African immigrants in NH to build Umokuumani, a community-based network to promote connection, mutual aid, and collaboration to address issues of shared concern. In each of these spaces, we bring our deep commitment to the rights and well-being of immigrants and to policies that are welcoming, dignified, and humane.

The Black & African Diaspora Learning Series was an exciting collaboration between AFSC's New Hampshire, North Carolina, and New Jersey programs which ran from June through September 2024. These three programs worked together to conduct a hybrid dialogue and training series for Black and African immigrants, African Americans, and people who self-identify as belonging to the African Diaspora. Thirty participants from across the country joined the eight-session series to build knowledge on key topics of history, systems of oppression and movements for justice. The goal of the series was to utilize cultural and trauma-informed wellness practices to build connection and develop the capacity of participants for leadership in local and national work for immigrant justice, healing justice, and economic justice. With the support of movement leaders who joined as guest speakers, participants developed a shared and intersectional analysis, a vision for humane policies, and opportunities for community building and collaborative action.

Our Healing Justice Program Associate built a leadership team of passionate and dedicated women to create the 'O So Beautiful' Reentry Program. They have worked together to create for other women the reentry program they wish had existed for themselves and their loved ones when they returned home from prison.

Change for Concord, a community organizing group for 18- to 30-year-olds, has also taken a significant step forward this year with the creation of a leadership team. Our Grassroots Organizer reached out to colleagues in the youth organizing field for guidance to design the new leadership team role; he led a search committee and hiring process; and brought on a team of new leaders in July 2024. The team are working to strengthen the membership of Change for Concord and to identify their next campaign.



Top left: Change for Concord (NH) vigil for Gaza. Top right: AFSC-NH staff Maggie Fogarty, Fisto Ndayishimiye, Grace Kindeke and Ophelia Burnett at the NH Union Leader's 40 Under Forty 2024 event, where Fisto and Grace were honored. At left: Youth graduate from AFSC's 11th annual Liberation Summer Camp in New York.

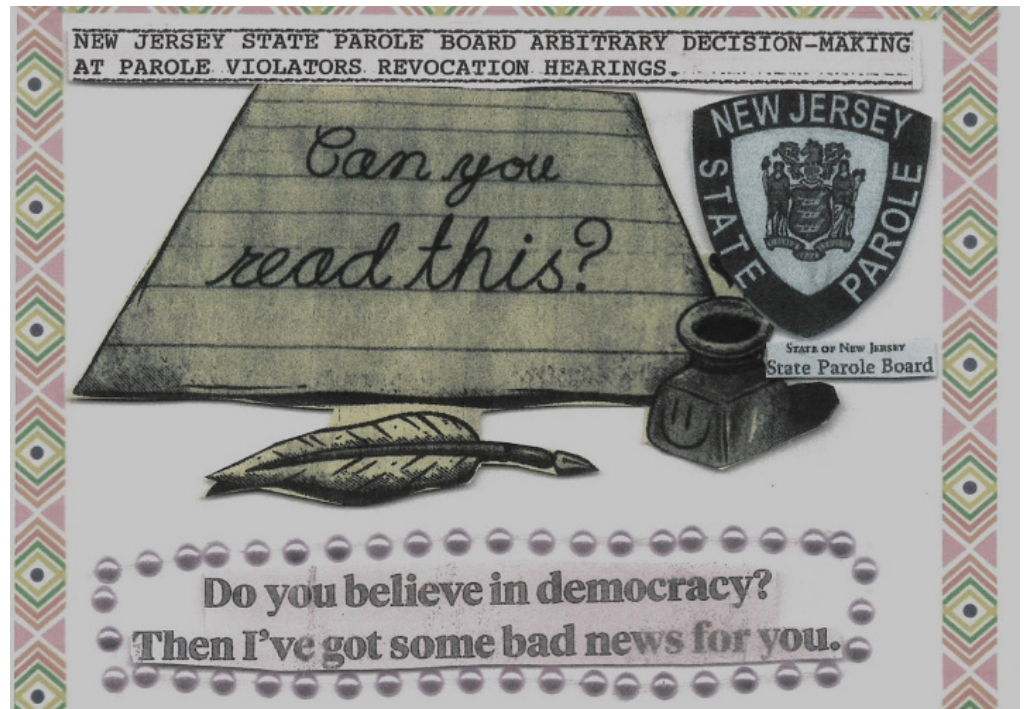
New York Healing Justice

Our local Healing Justice program continues its work to advocate with impacted individuals and allies for healing and accountability; investment in community; reentry support; decarceration; and ending criminalization, surveillance and prison profiteering in New York and New Jersey. We participated in abolition and decarceration coalitions and efforts, including with the Anti-Slavery National Network, the Campaign to Close Rikers, Think Twice, and Stop Cop City. We joined strategy sessions, press conferences and protests, and were successful in advocating against NYC budget cuts to vital community programs.

We continue to engage in transformative work with young people. Our five-month-long Liberation Academy program focuses on building skills for advocacy and community organizing with 10 burgeoning leaders, ages 18-25, so that they can organize for change in their communities. And we are [currently accepting applications](#) for 2025's Liberation Academy.

2024 also saw our 11th annual Liberation Summer Advocacy Training Camp. Liberation Summer Camp is a five-week camp that empowers high schoolers and young adults between the ages of 14 and 20 to learn to create change in their communities. Along with hands-on learning about the criminal legal system and the immigration system, campers used photography and documentary filmmaking skills from conception to completion and participated in workshops toward becoming an artist-activist.

Our [Prison Watch](#) project [released a report](#) last year. Titled “Voices from the Inside: Restructuring the Conversation on Technical Parole Violations,” it documents the harms caused by New Jersey’s parole system, which regularly sends people back to prison for minor violations of parole policies. The report advocates for an end to the incarceration of individuals for these violations while calling for investments in community support systems for returning citizens. The report has been shared widely with public officials throughout the state. There is already interest in implementing some of the recommendations in the report, which will result in a significant reduction in the number of people who are reincarcerated.



Above: Artwork by Ojore Nuru Lutalo for AFSC Prison Watch

[Please consider a tax-deductible donation to our Northeast Region](#), which will help support our ongoing work to resist oppression and create spaces for peace, justice and human dignity.

Also remember to check out the AFSC Alumni Page at www.afsc.org/alumni or via our Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/234049520577404 to engage with current and former AFSC staff, volunteers, interns and fellows.

Sincerely yours for peace and justice,

Keith B. Harvey
Northeast Regional Director

Nicole Miller
Northeast Associate Regional Director

DONATE

**VISIT THE AFSC.ORG
ACTION CENTER**

