

March 30, 2025

Dear Friends,

We bring greetings of love and peace to you, and pray that you are finding your way through these difficult times in our country.

We hold all in the Light, and after much discernment want to share our recent Sense of Meeting with all of our sister Meetings.

We welcome any thoughts that you might like to share with us.

In Friendship and Justice for all,

Linda Schneck, Clerk  
for the Northeast Kingdom Friends' Meeting  
Barton, Vermont

January 23, 2025

It is with sorrow but also with a sense of hope that we write to you today.

On Sunday, January 19, 2025, during our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, we labored through a discernment process to weigh the 'right relationship' between the NEK Quakers and NEYM. This was intense and often uncomfortable but always deep. Days after this labor, we are still attempting to process and evaluate, but our hearts are clear.

We cannot in good conscience support the decision of NEYM's leadership to hold Summer Sessions 2025 at UMass Amherst in light of the abuse perpetrated on that university's campus upon students, faculty, and community residents during the peaceful pro-peace/anti-genocide gatherings held there during the last academic year. The response of the General Secretary, Noah Merrill, to our letter and zoom conversation tells us that, once again, the priorities of the Yearly Meeting are not in alignment with Friends' established concerns for peace and justice for all.

This the latest in a series of choices that the NEYM has made over the last several years that we feel does not honor our Quaker testimonies of Peace, Integrity, and Justice for all. We have tried multiple times to address our deep concerns regarding the actions of the Yearly Meeting. Finally, we have come to the realization that we can no longer support the NEYM in the choices they are making. ***We will not stand aside in the face of injustice.***

Regarding the choice to have Yearly Sessions at Mass Amherst, we can all take a vital lesson from the Civil Rights Movement, specifically from an NAACP training manual:

"Civil rights leaders have a responsibility to carefully choose where they hold events, avoiding organizations, universities, or schools that actively support the oppression of minority groups or marginalized people, as doing so could be seen as legitimizing those oppressive practices and undermining their own message of equality and justice; essentially, by choosing to speak at such institutions, they risk sending a message that they condone the oppressive behavior, even, unintentionally."

Where does this bring us as a Monthly Meeting as we once again share our distress with a decision of the Yearly Meeting, a Yearly Meeting that was meant to be non-hierarchical and established to represent our Quaker beliefs?

After much threshing, prayer, and deep listening within and to each other, the Northeast Kingdom Monthly Meeting of Quakers has reached a Sense of Meeting that we will take a Jubilee Year sabbatical from direct engagement with NEYM.

As you may know, the spiritual significance of a "Jubilee year" is that it facilitates a time of renewal, forgiveness, and restoration. It signifies an opportunity for reconciliation within the Spirit and community. It is a time for deepened spiritual growth for all. We hope that the NEYM will take this opportunity for greater discernment, as well.

We will not send our usual financial support during this time of Spirit-led contemplation regarding our relationship with the New England Yearly Meeting. Instead, we will make a donation to an organization working for peace and justice in our world. We will continue to follow our leadings for peace and justice, aware that we cannot count on moral support from the larger body of the Religious Society of Friends. We will explore other Quaker avenues of connection. Once again, we hope that taking this step - momentous for us - will also allow the NEYM to spend time in discernment itself.

We have spent far too much time and energy simply trying to get an authentic response from the New England Yearly Meeting. The hour is late and it is time for Quakers to stand up for Peace and Equality for all. There are far too many challenges facing us as a nation and world to do anything less.

We will try to see what time, love, and Spirit-led action can do.

We welcome any thoughts that your Meeting may wish to share.

### **Resources on UMass Amherst treatment of peaceful student protests, Spring 2024:**

1) Colson Whitehead withdrew as the keynote speaker at UMass Amherst in 2024 BECAUSE of its appalling treatment of student protesters:

<https://www.wamc.org/news/2024-05-20/umass-amherst-graduation-ceremony-minus-keynote-speaker-features-pro-palestinian-demonstrations-by-students>

AND: <https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/10/colson-whitehead-withdraws-as-umass-commencement-speaker/>

## 2) The treatment of students at UMass:

"AMHERST — Pro-Palestinian students and other members of the University of Massachusetts Amherst community are criticizing Chancellor Javier Reyes, with the undergraduate Student Government Association officially voting “no confidence” in him on Wednesday night, after his administration called in police to break up a protest encampment on campus Tuesday, leading to the arrest of more than 130 people.

On Wednesday afternoon, demonstrators gathered in thunder and rain to decry the arrests many of them witnessed or experienced the night before, when police tackled protesters and pinned some to the ground. They wore face shields and flack vests, carrying bolt cutters, Tasers, mace, and zip ties. Student speakers said they had counted over 100 state police vehicles amassed on campus, and recounted injuries and inhumane conditions as police struggled to handle the number of incoming arrestees.

This all comes even as the university is under federal investigation by the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights over alleged anti-Palestinian discrimination.

When officers arrived on the scene, including state police in tactical gear, they surrounded students and faculty at the encampment and created a dividing line on the sidewalk near the W.E.B. Du Bois Library, announcing that anyone present on the wrong side of that line would be arrested. That zero-tolerance policy explicitly included journalists and legal observers, too, who were pushed back away from the encampment.

After first arresting faculty members shortly before 8 p.m., police began grabbing students at the front of the lines who were recording the encampment, causing a rush as protesters backed up and tripped. Some of those looking to help fallen protesters were also threatened with arrest. Police grabbed and arrested some of those students who appeared to be complying and attempting to film the encampment. They brandished pepper-ball launchers, aiming at students with fingers on their triggers.

After pressing the crowd away from the arrests, police refused to let anyone — including identified press and legal observers — near the encampment. Officers tackled several students near the encampment, pinning them to the ground before handcuffing them. Other police brandished pepper spray at face level toward unarmed protesters, including one with the name Ting on his uniform and his rank displayed as captain. Gabriel Ting is the Amherst Police Department’s new chief, having previously served as a captain.

"It's not a weapon, it's defensive," he told those who expressed concerns about the chemical spray.

Police used flash strobes throughout the arrests, disorienting students and obstructing recordings. Surveillance drones flew overhead."

<https://theshoestring.org/2024/05/09/after-violent-arrests-umass-pro-palestine-protestors-seek-chancellors-ouster/>

3) "UMass Seeking Felony Riot Charges Against Palestinian Activists"

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzQXKhKhsMfCjQWndVXGnpXCGNNq?compose=CllgCJvnJCTHFVDvkMWxpqhrJrQngmzZqgFsrCKtMpXRMxsQRDbSJpKXjLZdglVDSPiKnIJNtnV>

4) Leyla Moushabeck, the wife of Michel Moushabeck, founder of Interlink Press writes of her experience at the encampment in solidarity and her arrest:

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/11/08/opinion-who-are-universities-for/>

5) On the arrests:

<https://www.westernmassnews.com/2024/05/07/pro-palestinian-encampment-returns-umass-amherst-campus/>

6) Brutal arrests: "Opinion: I Was Present at the UMass Police Action and It Was Disgraceful"

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/10/opinion-i-was-present-at-the-umass-police-action-and-it-was-disgraceful/>

7) More here:

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/10/many-arrests-at-umass-as-police-dismantle-second-pro-palestinian-encampment/>

8) ACLU weighs in: "ACLU Statement on Arrests of UMass Amherst Protestors"

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/10/aclu-statement-on-arrests-of-umass-amherst-protestors/>

9) The brutality of the response by university and police:

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/10/umass-amherst-unions-condemn-crackdown-on-peaceful-campus-protest/>

10) Labor response to police violence:

"Area Labor Federation Condemns Police Violence and Mass Arrests at UMass"

<https://www.amherstindy.org/2024/05/17/area-labor-federation-condemns-police-violence-and-mass-arrests-at-umass/>

**Finally, here is a chilling foretaste of what we are now seeing in real time first with the crackdown on Columbia University, now expanding to 60 colleges and universities nationwide:**

“With words they try to jail us: US universities are not citadels of freedom. Today, the American university – just like the American nation-state – is once again at peak repression.”

(Donald Earl Collins)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/12/13/with-words-they-try-to-jail-us-us-universities-are-not-citadels-of-freedom>