

Witness coordinating committee endorsed a minute approved by Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. The minute asks for a new amendment to the United States Constitution that amends the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment. The minute is seeking to remove the exception clause that allows the institution of slavery to continue in the United States through imprisoning people.

Minute 2020.6.3, Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting

Friends consider a statement regarding the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution

Section 1 of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of the US constitution states:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

We propose a new amendment to the constitution that amends section 1 to state the following:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Friends support the spirit and intention of this proposal and approve the suggested amendment.

It is important that we begin this work now as the foundational documents of our country continue to allow for the inhumane treatment of imprisoned people. As is apparent in the current cases of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, along with the thousands of other deadly and nondeadly cases across the US, people of color are treated differently than non-people of color. This leads to disproportionate rates of arrest and incarceration of people of color. According to the June 20, 2020 Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Statistics on Race, African-Americans make up 38.1% (61,274 people) of all federally incarcerated people, while, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Statistics on Ethnicity, Hispanics make up 31.1% (49,874 people) of all federally incarcerated people. These people are considered slaves.

Efforts to change state Constitutions have started to occur around the country. Prior to 2018, the state of Colorado's Constitution read "there shall never be in this state either slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." Efforts to change the state Constitution began in 2016 to remove the exception. In the 2018 election, 66% of voters voted to change the state Constitution to state "there shall never be in this state either slavery or involuntary servitude." Vermont and Utah have also introduced measures to ban all slavery in their state Constitutions. New York, New Jersey and Connecticut State's Constitutions do not mention slavery.

There are many steps that must occur to pass an amendment to the US Constitution. Article V of the Constitution states the process as follows:

The Congress, whenever two thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the legislatures of two thirds of the several states, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three fourths of the several states, or by conventions in three fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress; provided that no amendment which may be made prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article; and that no state, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.

We ask New York Yearly Meeting to endorse this minute and authorize the Clerk and the General Secretary to sign the attached letter to send to the congressional delegations of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut introducing bills seeking two thirds approval from the House of Representatives and the Senate to begin the process of abolishing slavery in the United States. We also ask the Clerk to send this letter to other yearly and national meetings and other organizations as necessary to complete this work. We ask each local meeting to consider endorsing this minute and sending letters to their own representatives.