

Young Friends General Meeting

YOUNG ADULT QUAKERS IN BRITAIN



Lord William Wallace of Saltaire
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

Rt Hon Andrew Lansley CBE MP
1 House Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

1 November 2013

Dear William Wallace and Andrew Lansley

I am writing to you about the Lobbying Bill. While I support greater transparency in lobbying, I am concerned about the uncertainty over how this Bill will affect charities.

I am a trustee of Young Friends General Meeting. (Registered Charity Number: 1064763.) We are a group of Quakers aged 18 to 30ish, seeking to explore, support and nurture a spiritual community through faith and action. We work with other groups, some of which are charities and some of which are single-issue campaigning groups.

I understand that a number of different legal opinions have been given on whether and how this Bill as currently drafted would affect charities such as Young Friends General Meeting. It is precisely this uncertainty which worries me. If this law isn't clear in Parliament when it's a Bill – and it's not clear, because there are lawyers arguing both sides – then it won't be clear when it's an Act, and will be debated in the courts. I believe that our laws should be set by our representatives in Parliament rather than by lengthy legal battles.

Charity law is already very clear in restraining charities from supporting individual candidates or parties, whether directly or indirectly. While we have many volunteers, we have only one member of staff, shared with another Quaker organisation. Our annual expenditure is under £50,000. If this Bill were to cover some of our activities we may have to report to both the Charity Commission and the Electoral Commission. We would not have the capacity to comply with the additional reporting requirements.

As a charity trustee, I would feel less able to commit resources to legitimate campaigning activities because of this legislation. I fear that the uncertainty created by this Bill will have the unintended consequence of demoralising and silencing the charity sector.

Quakers have a number of suggestions and questions which we ask each other order to encourage thoughtful consideration of the world. These are known as Advices and Queries, and form part of the practice of our faith. Advice 34 says: "Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand." For me, these words go to the very core of how I live my faith, both as an individual and as a charity trustee. I do not wish to feel any uncertainly about whether I can follow the advice in these words.

Please take the opportunity in Parliament to consider and clarify the Lobbying Bill.

In Friendship

Jessica Metherringham
Management Trustee for Young Friends General Meeting

This letter is a personal letter written by Jessica Metherringham in her role as a trustee. It will be shared through social media as an example of letters sent by Quakers.