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Senator Susan M. Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Collins:

My colleagues and I at Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding were delighted to hear about your leadership in using a talking piece and circle process Sunday night to help negotiate a bi-partisan end to the government shutdown. Thank you! Many in this country long to see the return of civil discourse in our day-to-day conversations and at the highest levels of government.

From my 13 years as director of Mennonite Central Committee's Washington Office meeting with congressional leaders and staffers, I know how difficult group discussions and decision-making can be. Rooted in Native American practices, the use of something as simple as a talking piece can be an effective way to hear the individual perspectives of all participants and to make wise and unifying decisions.

I'd like to extend a personal invitation for you and/or your staffers to attend a course on circle processes at our Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI), which will be taught by Dr. Kay Pranis, one of the leading circle process experts in the United States. We also offer 20 other courses on a range of topics, including conflict analysis, facilitation and transformative leadership for organizational change (see enclosed materials).

SPI is an exciting place to be. Since 1994, our institute has hosted more than 3,200 people from 120 countries, many of whom work in government, judicial and legal systems within their respective countries.

We'd be pleased to welcome you on our campus in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley of Virginia – two hours southwest of Washington, DC. Or we would be willing to schedule a circles process training on Capitol Hill if that would be more helpful.

Warm regards,



J. Daryl Byler

Executive Director
Center for Justice and Peacebuilding