

Talia Honikman: Software Engineer by Trade, Tuberculosis Advocate by Choice

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In this series, Pathways spotlights advocates of tuberculosis, the world's leading cause of death from an infectious disease.

Talia Honikman's passion for tuberculosis (TB) advocacy grew from both personal and communal proximity to the disease.

A software engineer by trade, Honikman did not initially set out to work in global health. In fact, she currently works as a full stack engineer at Ford and is a classically trained violinist. Yet her early exposure to medicine during undergraduate studies years prior, combined with personal connections to infectious disease, shaped her trajectory.

TB, in particular, was not entirely unfamiliar. Honikman had heard about it growing up through family members who had experienced the disease. But it was not until much later, through an online advocacy community, that this awareness turned into something more.

Honikman became an integral part of [TB Fighters](#), a grassroots advocacy movement dedicated to fighting the structural causes of TB. There, she contributed her skillset to the organization in order to support a growing network of advocates.

“It was the collective of individuals who decided that it was worth being more practical about it,” Honikman said. “Not just operating in an information space, but doing something more profound.”

Still, she believed that nothing produces more impact than showing up and advocating in-person.

This conviction ultimately led her to TB Hill Day in Washington, D.C. on March 2-3, 2026, where advocates meet with lawmakers to push for TB-related funding and policy change. The momentous day brought together nearly 300 people (survivors, clinicians, researchers, and advocates) at every level of involvement, welcoming people to contribute in whatever ways their lives allowed.

“There's an appetite for solvable and digestible problems,” Honikman said. “This is something that can be advocated for across the aisle; it doesn't have to be partisan.”

What propels Honikman's efforts is the fact that TB persists despite its solvability. For her, the issue lies in a gap between awareness and action.

At Hill Day, over the course of two days, advocates met with congressional offices to discuss issues like federal funding for TB programs both globally and domestically due to cuts to USAID and other global development programs. Notably, there was roughly a [60% decline](#) in CDC TB funding since 1994 when adjusted for inflation.

What stood out most from the event, Honikman noted, was surprise among the lawmakers the TB advocates spoke to.

“There were a lot of people who were just surprised that it was still an issue,” she said. “That’s where you can use a statistic to demonstrate the gravity of the problem.”

The broader challenge is that TB is often perceived in the United States as a disease of the past, categorized alongside eradicated illnesses like polio. This misconception, Honikman argued, contributes to its continued neglect. “It’s just not something people consider relevant today,” she said.

Honikman recalls one meeting in which a staffer dismissed TB as a low priority, expressing their confidence in the U.S. healthcare system. While in another conversation, a representative’s personal connection to hearing loss, a known side effect of certain TB treatments, made them especially receptive to the issue.

“The fact that they vary so widely is a really good indication of where we are as a country,” she said.

Like many in the TB Fighters community, Honikman does not work in TB full-time. Instead, her contributions are woven into her daily life: communicating across advocacy networks, making phone calls, and actively raising awareness within her own circles.

“I will do things as I’m able to in my free time,” she said. “If something will really be beneficial, then it’s worth putting in that extra push.”

The fact that participation in advocacy exists on a spectrum, she noted, is part of what makes TB advocacy accessible.

“If you want to define yourself as a TB fighter, you totally are a TB fighter,” Honikman said. In her experience, advocacy is cumulative; even if progress is slow and uneven, one’s efforts should be disciplined and consistent.

Ultimately, Honikman’s advocacy reflects a simple but powerful idea: bridging the gap between awareness and action is not the responsibility of experts alone, but of anyone willing to step into the space.