Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

UPDATED June 1, 2018

The Honorable Tom Rooney
2160 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Rooney:

The undersigned organizations strongly oppose proposals that would politicize the charitable nonprofit and philanthropic community by repealing or weakening current federal tax law protections that prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political candidates.

Nonpartisanship is a cornerstone principle that has strengthened the public’s trust of the charitable community. In exchange for enjoying tax-exempt status and the ability to receive tax-deductible contributions, 501(c)(3) organizations – charitable nonprofits, including religious congregations, and foundations – agree to not engage in “any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.”

That provision of law protects the integrity and independence of charitable nonprofits and foundations. It shields the entire 501(c)(3) community against the rancor of partisan politics so the charitable community can be a safe haven where individuals of all beliefs come together to solve community problems free from partisan divisions. It screens out doubts and suspicions regarding ulterior partisan motives of charitable organizations, as undoubtedly would occur if even just a few charitable organizations engaged in partisan politics. Nonpartisan credibility is critical to the ability of 501(c)(3) organizations to work with elected officials of all parties at the local, state, and federal levels to address community needs.

Charitable nonprofits, including religious congregations, are free to speak on important matters of the day and advocate on public policy issues and legislation. Private foundations, while barred from most lobbying activities, are free to engage in public debates, promote public education efforts, and fund a wide range of issue-focused activities. The relevant language in Section 501(c)(3) merely prohibits partisan campaign intervention, defined to include endorsing or opposing candidates for public office, publishing or distributing statements for or against candidates, or using tax-deductible and other resources to support partisan campaign activities.

We are united in opposing any and all efforts to weaken or repeal this longstanding protection in the federal tax code (sometimes called the Johnson Amendment) that President Eisenhower signed into law in 1954. Weakening the law by allowing leaders of individual 501(c)(3) entities to endorse candidates for public office and engage in some partisan electioneering activities would damage the integrity and effectiveness of all charitable organizations and spawn litigation as innovative partisans seek to expand gray areas in the proposed legislation. Repealing the Johnson Amendment, an approach promoted by the President and some in Congress, would damage the federal Treasury as people take tax deductions for political contributions they could then funnel through charitable nonprofits, undercut fair elections by providing a loophole to avoid campaign contribution disclosure laws, and empower politicians to exert pressure for access to foundation assets and charitable funds for their own partisan campaigns rather than for the public good.
We urge you to join us in opposing efforts to weaken and/or repeal the current law that for six decades has successfully protected the integrity and effectiveness of charitable nonprofits and foundations by keeping them apart from partisan politics.

Respectfully,

Florida

Allegany Franciscan Ministries
ALSO Youth, Inc.
Alzheimer's & Dementia Resource Center
Americans United for Separation of Church and State - Atlantic Coast Chapter
Americans United for Separation of Church and State - Naples
Association of Fundraising Professionals Central Florida Chapter
Avant Garde Accounting and Business Solutions, LLC
Beacon of Hope Pine Island, Inc.
Bright Community Trust, Inc.
Bristol Strategy Group
Care First Disability Services LLC
Caridad Center
Cathedral Arts Project, Inc.
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Children's Home Society of Florida
Clearwater Free Clinic
Community Cancer Education, Inc.
Community Foundation of Broward
Community Foundation of Collier County
Cornerstone Housing, Inc.
Domestic Violence Shelter
Epilepsy Association of Central Florida, Inc.
Fanny Landwirth Foundation
Firehouse Cultural Center, Inc.
First Bristol FCU

Florida Alliance of Community Development Corporations, Inc.
Florida Association of Nonprofits
Florida Lions Conklin Centers for the Blind
Florida Nonprofit Alliance
Florida Philanthropic Network Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg
Freedom Payee Services, Inc.
Friends of the Carr Refuge
Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida
GiveWell Community Foundation, Inc.
Gobioff Foundation
Habitat for Humanity
Haitelmex Foundation, Inc.
High Seas Academy
Hispanic Services Council, Inc.
Ilse Newell Fund for the Performing Arts, Inc. - INConcert
Independence for the Blind of West Florida
Initiative Community International
Jessie Ball duPont Fund
Jobsite Theater
Josh Provides Epilepsy Assistance Foundation, Inc.
KBT & Associates
La Cacica Cimarrona
Education & Publishing, Inc.
Lemon Bay Playhouse, Inc.
Lighthouse Central Florida
Lighthouse SWFL, Inc.
Lydia B. Stokes Foundation
Mandarin Museum & Historical Society

Jacksonville

Fort Lauderdale
Daytona Beach
Jacksonville
St. Petersburg
Indian Harbour Beach
Jupiter
Lakeland
Tampa
Fort Lauderdale
Jacksonville
Tampa
Apalachicola
Pensacola
Jacksonville
Tampa
Sarasota
Jacksonville
Loiza
Englewood
Orlando
North Fort Myers
Gainesville
Jacksonville
Mary Lee Walker, LLC  Orlando  Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
Minority Help, Inc.  Pompano  Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
Pompano Beach  America Solidaria U.S.
MSL Grant Consulting  Bouca Raton  American Alliance of Museums
Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida  Jacksonville  American Association of Anatomists
Not A Dry Eye Foundation  Jacksonville  American Association of Physics Teachers
P.L. Dodge Foundation, Inc.  Miami  American Association of Teachers of German
Palm Beach Habilitation Center  Lake Worth  American Atheists
Pathfinder Outdoor Education  Bradenton  American Bladder Cancer Society
Phil-Com, LLC  Clearwater  American Board of Venous & Lymphatic Medicine
Pioneer Florida Museum  Dade City  American Conference of Academic Deans
Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida, Inc.  Fort Myers  American Heart Association
Rebuilding Together Miami-Dade  Miami  American Historical Association
RemediOcean, Inc.  Clearwater  American Jewish Committee
Risser Oil Corporation  St. Petersburg  American Medical Association Foundation
S J Edwards Foundation  Miami  American Medical Society
Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida  Orlando  American Physiological Society
South Palm Beach County Foundation  Boca Raton  American Podiatric Medical Association, Inc.
The Center for Abuse and Rape Emergencies (C.A.R.E.)  Punta Gorda  American Red Cross
The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida  Jacksonville  Americans for the Arts
The Glades Initiative, Inc.  Belle Glade  Americans Promoting Study Abroad
The Mustard Seed of Central Florida  Orlando  Americans United for Separation of Church and State
The Pride Center at Equality Park  Wilton Manors  Amyloidosis Foundation
Unity  Miami  Animal Legal Defense Fund
Volunteer Assistance to the Vulnerables  Hollywood  Annie E. Casey Foundation
Volunteers of America of Florida  Saint Petersburg  Anti-Defamation League
War on Poverty - Florida  Jacksonville  Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Waste Not Want Not, Inc.  Winter Park  Association for Jewish Outreach Professionals
Winter Park Health Foundation  Winter Park  Association of American Colleges and Universities
Your Nonprofit Advisor, Inc.  St. Petersburg  Association of Art Museum Directors
YWCA of Greater Miami-Dade, Inc.  Miami  Association of Direct Response Fundraising Counsel

National Organizations

Abila
Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic Education, Inc.
AdoptAClassroom.org
African Diaspora United, Inc.
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Citizen Schools
CleanSlateNow
Common Cause
Commonwealth Fund
Council on Foundations
Council for Global Equality
Dance USA
Dementia Society, Inc.
Democracy 21
Destination & Travel Foundation
Dietel Partners, LLC
Disability Rights Advocacy Fund
Easter Seals
Ecology Project International
Engineering Conferences International
Episcopal Relief & Development
Feed the Children
Feeding America
Fidesco USA
Food & Water Watch
Ford Foundation
Free Press
Girl Scouts of the USA
Girls Inc.
Global Integrity
Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
Greater Nonprofits
GuideStar
Habitat for Humanity International
Harbor Compliance
HawkWatch International
Hindu American Foundation
Histiocytosis Foundation
Horizons National
Human Science Institute
Independent Sector
International Essential Tremor Foundation
International Hearing Dog, Inc.
International Performing Arts for Youth
International Primate Protection League
Issue One
Jessie Ball DuPont Fund
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Federations of North America
Leadership USA
League of American Orchestras
League of Women Voters
Leukemia Research Foundation
Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education
Lumina Foundation
Lymphoma Foundation of America
Migraine Research Foundation
Millennium Water Alliance
Mentors International
Morino Ventures, LLC
National 4-H Council
National Alliance of Community Economic Development
National Association of Charitable Gift Planners
National Association of Health Data Organizations
National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA)
National Association of Watch and Collectors
National Association for Shoplifting Prevention
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Center for Fire and Life Safety
National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
National Council of Behavioral Health
National Council of Churches
National Council of Nonprofits
National Council of Tribes
National Dance Education Organization
National Hartford Centers of Gerontological Nursing Excellence
National Human Services Assembly
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation
National Runaway Safeline
National Safe Place Network
National Tongan American Society
NEO Law Group
North American Bramble Growers Research Foundation
OPERA America
Partnership for America's Children
Pension Fund of the Christian Church
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement
Project Wet Foundation
Project Managers Without Borders
Public Citizen
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Secular Coalition for America
Senior Executives Association
Seva Foundation
Skillman Foundation
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Smith’s Food and Drug
Social Velocity
The Arc of the United States
The Aspen Institute
The Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc.
The Commonwealth Fund
The Dibble Institute
The Educational Foundation of America
The George Gund Foundation
The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The Ocean Foundation
The Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
The Voter Participation Center
TIDES
Unemployment Services Trust
Union for Reform Judaism
United Philanthropy Forum
United Soldiers and Sailors of America
United Way Worldwide
University Professional & Continuing Education Association
US Lacrosse
Vasculitis Foundation
Volunteers in Medicine
Volunteers of America
Voto Latino
Wallace Global Fund
WasteWater Education
Weingart Foundation
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Words Without Borders
World Day of Prayer USA
World Neighbors, Inc.
Youth Services America
YWCA USA