

Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

UPDATED September 5, 2017

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
2112 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bilirakis:

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	Palm Harbor	Florida Alliance of Community Development Corporations, Inc.	Jacksonville
ALSO Youth, Inc.	Sarasota	Florida Association of Nonprofits	Fort Lauderdale
Alzheimer's & Dementia Resource Center	Orlando	Florida Lions Conklin Centers for the Blind	Daytona Beach
Americans United for Separation of Church and State - Atlantic Coast Chapter	Palm Coast	Florida Nonprofit Alliance	Jacksonville
Americans United for Separation of Church and State - Naples	Naples	Florida Philanthropic Network	
Association of Fundraising Professionals Central Florida Chapter	Orlando	Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg
Avant Garde Accounting and Business Solutions, LLC	New Port Richey	Freedom Payee Services, Inc.	
Beacon of Hope Pine Island, Inc.	St. James City		Indian Harbour Beach
Bright Community Trust, Inc.	Clearwater	Friends of the Carr Refuge	
Bristol Strategy Group	Pembroke Pines	Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida	Jupiter
Caridad Center	Boyton Beach	GiveWell Community Foundation, Inc.	Lakeland
Cathedral Arts Project, Inc.	Jacksonville	Gobioff Foundation	Tampa
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers	Fort Lauderdale	Habitat for Humanity	
Children's Home Society of Florida	Orlando	Haitelmex Foundation, Inc.	Fort Lauderdale
Clearwater Free Clinic	Clearwater	High Seas Academy	Jacksonville
Community Cancer Education, Inc.	Cape Coral	Hispanic Services Council, Inc.	Tampa
Community Foundation of Broward	Fort Lauderdale	Ilse Newell Fund for the Performing Arts, Inc. - INConcert	Apalachicola
Community Foundation of Collier County	Naples	Independence for the Blind of West Florida	Pensacola
Cornerstone Housing, Inc.	Sarasota	Initiative Community International	
Domestic Violence Shelter	Ponte Vedra	Jessie Ball duPont Fund	Jacksonville
Epilepsy Association of Central Florida, Inc.	Orlando	Jobsite Theater	Tampa
Fanny Landwirth Foundation		Josh Provides Epilepsy Assistance Foundation, Inc.	Sarasota
Firehouse Cultural Center, Inc.	Ruskin	KBT & Associates	Jacksonville
First Bristol FCU		La Cacica Cimarrona Education & Publishing, Inc.	Loiza
		Lemon Bay Playhouse, Inc.	Englewood
		Lighthouse Central Florida	Orlando
		Lighthouse SWFL, Inc.	North Fort Myers

Lydia B. Stokes Foundation	Gainesville	AdoptAClassroom.org
Mandarin Museum & Historical Society	Jacksonville	Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
Mary Lee Walker, LLC	Orlando	Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
Minority Help, Inc.	Pompano Beach	America Solidaria U.S.
MSL Grant Consulting	Boca Raton	American Alliance of Museums
Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida	Jacksonville	American Association of Anatomists
Not A Dry Eye Foundation		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		American Bladder Cancer Society
Phil-Com, LLC	Bradenton	American Board of Venous & Lymphatic Medicine
Pioneer Florida Museum	Dade City	American Brass Chamber Music Association
Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida, Inc.	Fort Myers	American Conference of Academic Deans
Rebuilding Together Miami- Dade	Miami	American Heart Association
RemediOcean, Inc.	Clearwater	American Historical Association
Risser Oil Corporation	St. Petersburg	American Jewish Committee
S J Edwards Foundation		American Medical Association Foundation
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
Volunteers of America of Florida	Saint Petersburg	Annie E. Casey Foundation
War on Poverty - Florida	Jacksonville	Anti-Defamation League
Waste Not Want Not, Inc.		Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Winter Park Health Foundation	Winter Park	Association for Jewish Outreach Professionals
Your Nonprofit Advisor, Inc.	St. Petersburg	Association of American Colleges and Universities
YWCA of Greater Miami- Dade, Inc.	St. Petersburg	Association of Art Museum Directors

National Organizations

Abila
Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic
Education, Inc.

BoardSource
Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun
Violence
Camp Fire
Campion Foundation
Catholic Charities USA
Catholic Mobilizing Network
Center for Health, Environment & Justice
Center for Inquiry

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Citizen Schools
CleanSlateNow
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
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

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Florida

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 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