

Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

UPDATED September 5, 2017

The Honorable Bruce Poliquin
1208 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Poliquin:

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,

Maine			
Acadia Center	Rockport	Maine Equal Justice Partners	Augusta
Beth C. Wright Cancer Resource Center	Ellsworth	Maine Maritime Museum	Bath
Bicycle Coalition of Maine	Portland	Maine Media College	Camden
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southern Maine	Portland	Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad Company & Museum	Portland
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences	East Boothbay	Maine Philanthropy Center	Portland
Bridgton Community Center	Bridgton	Maine Preservation	Yarmouth
Brunswick Downtown Association	Brunswick	Maine Pretrial Services	Portland
Coastal Opportunities		Maine Public Health Association	Augusta
Cobscook Bay Resource Center	Eastport	Maine Robotics	Orono
Community Access to the Arts	Great Barrington	Maine State Society for the Protection of Animals	South Windham
Community Partners, Inc. Day One	Biddeford	Maine Women's Fund	Falmouth
Dietel Partners, LLC	South Portland	Midcoast Conservancy	
Downeast Coastal Conservancy	Yarmouth	Moosehead Marine Museum	Greenville
Fifth Maine Regiment Museum, Peaks Island, ME	Machias	My Place Teen Center	Westbrook
Friends of Casco Bay	Peaks Island	Natural Resources Council of Maine	Augusta
Friends of Fort Gorges	South Portland	Neighborhood House Club, Inc.	
Girls on the Run-Maine	Portland	New Beginnings	Lewiston
Great Bay Services	Sanford	Oasis Free Clinics	Brunswick
Hardy Girls Healthy Women	Waterville	P.A.W.S. Animal Adoption Center	Rockport
Heritage Radio Society, Inc.	Yarmouth	Pierre Monteux School & Music Festival	Hancock
Justice For Our Neighbors		Portland Chamber Music Festival	Portland
Laudholm Trust	Wells	Portland Conservatory of Music	Portland
LearningWorks	Portland	Portland Stage Company	Portland
Lift360	Portland	Rangeley Friends of the Arts	Rangeley
Literacy Volunteers of Greater Sanford		SAGE Maine	Hancock
Loaves & Fishers, Inc.		SailMaine	Portland
Main Street Bath Maine	Bath	Sally A. Morris, Attorney at Law	Portland
Maine Association of Nonprofits		SeniorsPlus	Lewiston
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault		Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative	Portland
Maine Council of Churches	Portland	Susan L. Curtis Charitable Foundation	Portland
Maine Crafts Association	Gardiner		

Sweetser	Saco	Americans for the Arts
Syntiro	Readfield	Americans Promoting Study Abroad
The Bingham Program	Augusta	Americans United for Separation of Church and State
The Center for Wisdom's Women	Lewiston	Amyloidosis Foundation
The Ecology School	Saco	Animal Legal Defense Fund
The Hope-JG Foundation		Annie E. Casey Foundation
The Iris Network	Scarborough	Anti-Defamation League
The Maine Project for Fine Art Conservation-Project MEAC		Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Three Rivers Land Trust	Portland	Association for Jewish Outreach Professionals
Topsham, Maine Public Library	Springvale	Association of American Colleges and Universities
Tri-County Literacy	Topsham	Association of Art Museum Directors
United Way of York County	Bath	Association of Direct Response Fundraising Counsel
Upcycle Maine	Kennebunk	Association of Fundraising Professionals
Uplift, Inc.	North Berwick	Association of Immunization Managers
Victoria Mansion	Gardiner	Association of Nature Center Administrators
VMS Consulting	Portland	Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
Wardtown Mobile Home Cooperative	Scarborough	Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
White Dog Communications	Freeport	Baptist Women in Ministry
White Pine Programs	Westbrook	Barr Foundation
YWCA Central Maine	Cape Neddick	BoardSource
YWCA Mount Desert Island	Lewiston	Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun Violence

National Organizations

Abila	Camp Fire
Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic Education, Inc.	Campion Foundation
AdoptAClassroom.org	Catholic Charities USA
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities	Catholic Mobilizing Network
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation	Center for Health, Environment & Justice
America Solidaria U.S.	Center for Inquiry
American Alliance of Museums	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
American Association of Anatomists	Citizen Schools
American Association of Physics Teachers	CleanSlateNow
American Association of Teachers of German	Commonwealth Fund
American Atheists	Council on Foundations
American Bladder Cancer Society	Council for Global Equality
American Board of Venous & Lymphatic Medicine	Dance USA
American Brass Chamber Music Association	Dementia Society, Inc.
American Conference of Academic Deans	Democracy 21
American Heart Association	Destination & Travel Foundation
American Historical Association	Dietel Partners, LLC
American Jewish Committee	Disability Rights Advocacy Fund
American Medical Association Foundation	Easter Seals
American Physiological Society	Ecology Project International
American Podiatric Medical Association, Inc.	Engineering Conferences International
American Red Cross	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
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