

# Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Gerry E. Connolly  
2238 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Connolly:

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,

**Virginia Organizations**

Amara Legal Center	Alexandria
American Alliance of Museums	Arlington
ANA	Alexandria
Art League, commission for the arts	Suffolk
Association of Fundraising Professionals	Arlington
Bernardine Franciscan Sisters Foundation	Newport News
Blue Ridge Independent Living Center	Roanoke
Bolinger Advisors, LLC	McLean
Capital Caring	Falls Church
Catholic Charities USA	
Center for Health Environment and Justice	
Center for Nonprofit Excellence	Charlottesville
CH Brownstein	Richmond
Child Care Aware of Virginia	Richmond
Children's Assistive Technology Service	Roanoke
Colón & Associates, LLC	Vienna
Commonwealth Baptist Church	Alexandria
Council on Foundations	Arlington
DePaul Community Resources	Roanoke
Farmville Area Habitat for Humanity	Farmville
FeedMore, Inc.	Richmond
Friends of the Rappahannock	Fredericksburg
Geek@Heart	Reston
Gloucester Mathews Care Clinic	Gloucester Point
Goodwin House Foundation	Alexandria
GuideStar	Williamsburg
Hope Resources Incorporated	
MajorGiving.com	Winchester
Morrison Nonprofit Transitions	Woodstock
National Alliance on Mental Illness	Arlington
National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence	Reston
National Philharmonic	Falls Church
PATH Foundation	Warrenton

Peace Operations Training Institute	
Rainmakers LLC	Arlington
Rappahannock United Way	Fredericksburg
River Road Church, Baptist	Richmond
Sabu International School Foundation	
STEM for Her	
Taking Action for Special Kids	North Tazewell
The Advancement Foundation	Vinton
The Art League	Alexandria
Traveling Players Ensemble	Great Falls
United Way of Montgomery, Radford & Floyd	Christiansburg
United Way Worldwide	
Vietnamese Resettlement Association	Fairfax County
Virginia Chapter - Americans United for Separation of Church and State	Virginia Beach
Volunteers of America	Alexandria
Washington County Va. Habitat for Humanity	Abingdon
Williamsburg Community Foundation	Williamsburg
YWCA of Central Virginia	
YWCA South Hampton Roads	Norfolk

**National Organizations**

Abila  
 Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic Education, Inc.  
 AdoptAClassroom.org  
 Alliance for Strong Families and Communities  
 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation  
 American Alliance of Museums  
 American Association of Anatomists  
 American Association of Physics Teachers  
 American Association of Teachers of German  
 American Bladder Cancer Society  
 American Board of Venous & Lymphatic Medicine  
 American Brass Chamber Music Association  
 American Conference of Academic Deans

American Heart Association  
American Historical Association  
American Jewish Committee  
American Medical Association Foundation  
American Physiological Society  
American Podiatric Medical Association, Inc.  
American Red Cross  
Americans for the Arts  
Americans Promoting Study Abroad  
Americans United for Separation of Church  
and State  
Amyloidosis Foundation  
Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center  
Association for Jewish Outreach Professionals  
Association of American Colleges and  
Universities  
Association of Art Museum Directors  
Association of Direct Response Fundraising  
Counsel  
Association of Fundraising Professionals  
Association of Immunization Managers  
Association of Nature Center Administrators  
Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice  
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty  
Baptist Women in Ministry  
Barr Foundation  
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  
Ecology Project International  
Engineering Conferences International  
Feed the Children  
Feeding America  
Food & Water Watch  
Ford Foundation  
Forum of Regional Associations of  
Grantmakers  
Free Press  
Girl Scouts of the USA  
Girls Inc.  
Global Integrity  
Goodwill Industries, International  
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 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 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  
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Center for Appropriate Technology  
National Center for Fire and Life Safety  
National Committee for Responsive  
Philanthropy  
National Council of Behavioral Health

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Virginia

National Council of Churches  
National Council of Nonprofits  
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 Commonwealth Fund  
The Dibble Institute  
The Educational Foundation of America  
The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi  
The Michael J. Fox Foundation  
The Ocean Foundation  
The Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation  
The Voter Participation Center  
TIDES  
Unemployment Services Trust  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Way Worldwide  
University Professional & Continuing  
Education Association  
US Lacrosse  
Vasculitis Foundation  
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