

Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
1233 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

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,

Wisconsin Organizations

		Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council	Milwaukee
Advocates of Ozaukee	Sauville	Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth, Inc.	Milwaukee
ArtWorks for Milwaukee	Milwaukee	Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity	Milwaukee
Association for Pelvic Organ Prolapse Support	Mukwonago	Milwaukee Public Theatre	Milwaukee
AVK Education, Inc.	Glendale	Moose International	Mukwonago
Brookhill Institute of Mathematics	Waukesha	Muskego Senior Taxi	Muskego
Burleigh Street Community Development, Inc.	Milwaukee	Nativity Jesuit Academy	Milwaukee
Center for Media and Democracy		Natural Heritage Land Trust, Inc.	Madison
Center for Veterans Issues, Ltd.	Milwaukee	Neighborhood House of Milwaukee	Milwaukee
Chippewa Area Mentor Program	Chippewa Falls	NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region	Beloit
Chippewa Valley Museum	Eau Claire	Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee	Milwaukee
Chippewa Valley Transit Alliance	Eau Claire	North Country Independent Living	superior
CommonGround Ministry, Inc.		Optimist Theatre	Milwaukee
Comunidad	Whitefish Bay	Pathfinders Milwaukee, Inc.	Milwaukee
COPE Services	Grafton	Penfield Children's Center	Milwaukee
Covey	Allenton	Project Concern	St. Francis
Cudahy-St. Francis Interfaith		Project Concern of Cudahy-St. Francis	Cudahy
Diefenbach Communications Strategies	Milwaukee	Racine Community Foundation	Racine
Diverse and Resilient	Milwaukee	Rare & Undiagnosed Network	Delafield
Dominican Center		River Falls Community Food Pantry	River Falls
Door County Land Trust	Mequon	Royal Academy of Dance	Milwaukee
Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin	West Allis	Savage Support Corp	Milwaukee
Ebenezer Child Care Centers, Inc.	Milwaukee	Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin	Madison
ERAs Senior Network, Inc.	Waukesha	Skylight Music Theatre	Milwaukee
Ex Fabula	Milwaukee	Spectrum Nonprofit Services	Milwaukee
Feeding Wisconsin	Madison	Spotted Eagle, Inc.	Milwaukee
Fortunate Futures	Milwaukee	Stepping Stones of Dunn County	Menomonie
Forward Community Investments	Madison	The Addiction Resource Council, Inc.	Waukesha
Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.	Madison	The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection	La Crosse
Hearthstone Historic House Museum	Appleton	The Rainbow Project, Inc. Child & Family Counseling and Trauma Resource Clinic	Madison
Howe Community Resource Center	Green Bay	Tikkun Ha-Ir	Milwaukee
Hunger Task Force	Milwaukee	Urban Affairs Association	Milwaukee
IN Progress Consulting LLC	Milwaukee	Urban Economic Development Association of Wisconsin (UEDA)	Milwaukee
IndependenceFirst	Milwaukee	Veterans Employment Alliance, Inc.	Greenfield
J B Plumping	Milwaukee		
La Causa, Inc.	Milwaukee		
Madison Area Bus Advocates	Madison		
Madison Community Foundation	Madison		

VLCF
Volunteer Center of Ozaukee County Grafton
WasteCap Resource Solutions Milwaukee
Waukesha Civic Theatre Waukesha
Wisconsin Breast Cancer Coalition Milwaukee
Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers, Inc. Madison
Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired Madison
Wisconsin EMS Association Wind Lake
Wisconsin Lutheran High School Milwaukee
Wisconsin Nonprofits Association
Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development Madison
Wisconsin Scholastic Chess Federation Milwaukee
Wisconsin Transit Riders Alliance Milwaukee
YWCA - Greater Green Bay Green Bay
YWCA Southeast Wisconsin Milwaukee

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
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