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Nonprofits to Congress: Keep Partisan Politics Away from Nonprofit Missions

Nearly 4,500 organizations call on Congress to protect the longstanding Johnson Amendment and nonprofit nonpartisanship.

Washington, DC – A broad, nationwide coalition of 501(c)(3) organizations, made up of charitable nonprofits, including religious institutions, and foundations, delivered a clear message to Congress today: maintain the current law that protects nonprofit organizations from being hounded for partisan political contributions and endorsements.

The [Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship](#), signed by nearly 4,500 organizations from every state and every segment of the charitable and foundation communities, makes a strong statement in support of nonpartisanship and urges those who have vowed to repeal or weaken this vital protection to leave existing law in place for nonprofit organizations and the people they serve.

At issue is a provision in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code that conditions tax-exempt status and the ability to receive tax-deductible contributions on the agreement of charitable organizations and foundations to refrain from

engaging in “any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.” The provision is often referred to as the “Johnson Amendment” because it was proposed by then-Senate Minority Leader Johnson to legislation passed by a Republican-controlled Congress and signed by President Eisenhower in 1954.

“Nonpartisanship is vital to the work of charitable nonprofits. It enables organizations to address community challenges, and invites the problem-solving skills of all residents, without the distractions of party labels and the divisive partisan politics that currently bedevils our country,” said Tim Delaney, President and CEO of the [National Council of Nonprofits](#). “Indeed, current law is the reason that charitable nonprofits are trusted safe havens from partisanship, a place where people can come together to actually solve community problems rather than just posture and remain torn apart.”

“Charitable foundations serve to channel the generosity of private citizens towards the causes and issues that resonate with their passions and experiences,” remarked Vikki Spruill, President & CEO, [Council on Foundations](#). “For them to continue to fulfill this purpose, it is crucial that the public trust they have earned over the years is not diminished by partisan labels or influence.”

Lee Sherman, President and CEO of the [National Human Services Assembly](#), observed, “For more than sixty years, the protections of the Johnson Amendment have allowed nonprofits to be a trusted resource in the community and to serve and appeal to people of *all* political persuasions. Continuation of the provision ensures that the nonprofit sector can continue to play a vital, and impartial, role in building stronger communities, maintaining well-being across the nation, and providing the opportunity for our citizens to reach their human potential. We should be free to focus on our work and ensure that our communities thrive without engaging in the challenges of partisan politics.”

The [Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship](#) is the second major communication on this issue delivered to Congress this week. On April 4, almost 100 religious and denominational organizations from across faiths [delivered a letter](#) declaring that they “strongly oppose any effort to weaken or eliminate protections” in Section 501(c)(3). These messages from broad-based organizations that depend on the public trust are reinforced by recent polling data showing that Americans do not want the rancor of partisan politics to be invading their cherished nonprofits or

church sanctuaries. Research published March 30 by Independent Sector and the Bright Lines Project reveals that [72 percent of American voters](#) want to keep current rules prohibiting 501(c)(3) organizations from engaging in partisan political activity.

More information

- [Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship](#) (April 5, 2017)
- [List of Signers, by State](#)
- [Letter and Materials from Religious and Denominational Organizations](#) (April 4, 2017)
- [National Poll Finds That Americans Support the Johnson Amendment to Protect Nonprofit Nonpartisanship](#), Independent Sector and Bright Lines Project (March 30, 2017)

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About the Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship

The Community Letter is part of a collaborative initiative led by [National Council of Nonprofits](#), [Alliance for Strong Families and Communities](#), [BoardSource](#), [Council on Foundations](#), [Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers](#), [Habitat for Humanity International](#), [Independent Sector](#), [Jewish Federations of North America](#), [National Human Services Assembly](#), and [Volunteers of America](#). This broad-based coalition has formed to protect a cornerstone of the 501(c)(3) community, its ability to solve problems in localities across the country by bringing people together without the rancor of partisan politics getting in the way. The initiative seeks to protect the current law (known as the Johnson Amendment) that ensures 501(c)(3) organizations remain nonpartisan and focused on mission instead of partisan politics.