

April 17, 2017

To Congress:

The Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York (NPCC) calls on you in the strongest possible terms to block any attempt to repeal or weaken the important provision in Section 501(c)(3) that protects charitable nonprofits, religious institutions, and foundations from the divisiveness and rancor of partisan politics that currently bedevils our country.

NPCC – the largest sector-wide network of nonprofits in New York City, with nearly 1,500 members – is not alone in our firm opposition to any changes to this longstanding law. This month, more than 200 organizations in New York – charities, religious congregations, foundations, and others concerned about the health of the community, stood resolutely in opposition to changing the existing protection in Section 501(c)(3) sometimes called the “Johnson Amendment” (after then Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson who offered an amendment adopted without opposition by the majority in the Senate and later passed by the Republican-controlled House and signed by President Eisenhower in 1954).

Those New York organizations were part of nearly 4,500 organizations from all 50 states that signed a joint Community Letter in Support of Nonprofit Nonpartisanship. Many of our state’s most trusted organizations and our nation’s largest networks of Section 501(c)(3) organizations proudly signed the letter on behalf of the tens of thousands of their members. A sampling of the charitable nonprofits groups signing the letter includes Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Philanthropy New York, the Ford Foundation, United Neighborhood Houses, Americans for the Arts, Catholic Charities USA, Council on Foundations, Feeding America, Girl Scouts USA, Goodwill Industries, Habitat for Humanity, League of Women Voters, National Council of Churches, National Council of Nonprofits, and Volunteers of America. See the enclosed Community Letter delivered to your Washington office on April 5, 2017.

Importantly, the charitable and philanthropic communities in New York and across America also stand in unity with almost 100 national and state religious and denominational organizations that “strongly oppose” repealing or watering down of the vital protection in the Johnson Amendment that they note “serves as a valuable safeguard for the integrity of our charitable sector and campaign finance system.” They stress, and we agree: “People of faith do not want partisan political fights infiltrating their houses of worship. Houses of worship are spaces for members of religious communities to come together, not be divided along political lines; faith ought to be a source of connection and community, not division and discord.” A copy of the faith-based letter was delivered to your Washington office on April 4, 2017.

These charitable, philanthropic, and religious organizations must earn the public’s trust daily in order to advance their missions. And the public has made very clear that they do not want the law weakened or destroyed. A nationwide poll conducted last month revealed that 72 percent of Americans do not want partisan politics polluting their local nonprofits or houses of worship. The opposition of religious leaders to mixing church and partisan politics is even starker, with almost nine out of ten evangelical pastors (89 percent) declaring that they want to keep partisan politics out of their churches.

In summary, America's charities, churches, foundations, clergy, and people want to keep partisan politics away from Section 501(c)(3) organizations. The protections of the Johnson Amendment have served our country well for more than 60 years. There are plenty of ways for individuals and organizations to engage in partisan activities – but they should not be able to receive tax-deductible donations to do so.

Please let us know that the people in New York can count on you to oppose H.R. 172 and H.R. 781/S.264, as well as to block any attempt in any legislation that seeks to repeal, weaken, or work around the vital protection in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code known as the Johnson Amendment.

Very truly yours,

Sharon Stapel
President

Ian Benjamin
Board Chair

Enclosures:

Community Letter in Support of Nonpartisanship – New York and National signers (April 5, 2017)