

November 3, 2017

Mr. Kevin Brady
Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
Washington, D.C. 20515

Mr. Richard Neal
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways and Means
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Brady and Ranking Member Neal:

The 78 undersigned organizations write to strongly oppose the inclusion of any language in the tax reform package that would repeal or weaken the long-standing federal law that is sometimes referred to as the “Johnson Amendment.” The current law protects the integrity and independence of tax-exempt organizations, including houses of worship, by ensuring they do not endorse or oppose candidates. Americans support existing law because they do not want our charities and houses of worship to be torn apart by partisan campaign politics.

Repealing or weakening the law would allow candidates and political parties to pressure tax-exempt organizations for endorsements, transforming them into tools for their own political gain. It would also fundamentally alter the character of tax-exempt organizations, dividing congregations and communities, eroding the public trust, and turning them into conduits for the flow of secret money.

Under the current law, which has been in place for the last six decades, houses of worship and nonprofit organizations have maintained robust free speech rights and can speak out on any political and social issue that they see as important. They currently can engage in public debate on any issue, and even, with a few boundaries, lobby on specific legislation. Moreover, in the election arena, they can – on a nonpartisan basis – host candidate forums, hold voter registration drives, encourage people to vote, help transport people to the polls, and invite candidates to speak. They simply cannot endorse or oppose candidates and maintain their special tax-exempt status.

The Johnson Amendment serves as a valuable safeguard that protects our nonprofit organizations and our political process. Therefore, we firmly urge you to oppose any language in the tax reform legislation that would weaken the current law.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
African Methodist Episcopal Church
Alliance of Baptists
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Atheists
American Conference of Cantors
American Humanist Association
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists
Baptist Center for Ethics
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Baptist Women in Ministry
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
BoardSource
Burlesque Hall of Fame, Inc.
Campaign Legal Center
Catholics for Choice
Center for American Progress
Center for Inquiry
Center on Conscience & War
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Christian Board of Publication
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy
End Citizens United
The Episcopal Church
Equal Partners in Faith
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Feeding America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of the Earth
Girls Inc.
Girls on the Run International
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
The Henry Ford
Human Rights Campaign
Interfaith Alliance
International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Federations of North America
Lymphoma Foundation of America
Medical Students for Choice
Men of Reform Judaism
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Charitable Gift Planners
National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Nonprofits
National Human Services Assembly
New Ways Ministry
Nonprofit Leadership Alliance
North American Bramble Growers Research Foundation
Pension Fund of the Christian Church
People For the American Way
Phillips Theological Seminary
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Public Citizen
Religious Institute
Secular Coalition for America
Senior Executives Association (SEA)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Volunteers of America
WasteWater Education Inc. 501(c)3
Women of Reform Judaism