

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