November 17, 2017

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

CC: Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

As Congress debates the Fiscal Year 2018 funding mechanism, we urge you to oppose any riders that could politicize charitable nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

In the 115th Congress, there has not been a single congressional hearing or committee policy discussion to examine the impact of amending or eliminating the current federal tax provisions that prohibit tax-exempt organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political candidates. This longstanding protection, better known as the Johnson Amendment, has served as an important legal precedent separating charitable organizations from electoral politics. It is a dangerous precedent to bypass House rules and standards by addressing this issue in appropriations legislation.

Since 1954, the Johnson Amendment has ensured that tax-exempt organizations, including charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations do not endorse or oppose political candidates. It protects the right of these organizations to discuss political and social issues while, at the same time, ensuring they are not pressured by political candidates, campaigns, and donors to take a side in divisive partisan elections.

As you know, preserving the Johnson Amendment is widely supported by religious organizations and denominations, faith leaders, secular nonprofits, and the overwhelming majority of Americans. Since August 2017, more than 4,200 faith leaders have sent letters to all Members of Congress strongly opposing any efforts to weaken or repeal the Johnson Amendment. Similarly, in September, more than 5,500 organizations from all 50 states wrote each of us expressing opposition to any changes to the Johnson Amendment.

For decades, this policy has shielded our nation’s charitable community against the rancor of partisan politics and allowed them to freely address humanitarian, social, and community-specific problems in a nonpartisan manner. Simply said, Americans do not want houses of worship, charitable nonprofits, and foundations to become points of leverage for partisan politics. Nor do they want tax-exempt, charitable contributions to be funneled into political campaigns.

As always, we appreciate your consideration of our views on this grave matter, and we respectfully request that you ensure any end-of-the-year budget deal retain the Johnson Amendment without modification.

Sincerely,
Assistant Democratic Leader
James E. Clyburn
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

Beto O'Rourke
Member of Congress

Democratic Whip
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Sander M. Levin
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Joe Crowley
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress
Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Salud O. Carbajal  
Member of Congress

Elizabeth H. Esty  
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle  
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress
Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

Carol Shea-Porter  
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider  
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Marc A. Veasey  
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

John K. Delaney  
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas  
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress
Jared Polis
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Jerry Nadler
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress