



Protecting Nonprofit Nonpartisanship: Why It Matters to Kentucky Communities

Nonprofits Serve People, Not Parties

Nonprofits are deeply woven into the fabric of Kentucky life—from food shelves and veteran support to arts organizations and afterschool programs. These organizations are trusted by their communities because they focus on mission, not politics.

Federal law has long required 501(c)(3) nonprofits to remain **nonpartisan**, meaning they cannot endorse, oppose, or contribute to candidates for public office. This protects public trust, donor confidence, and the ability of nonprofits to work with elected officials across the aisle.

Why Repealing Nonprofit Nonpartisanship Is a Bad Idea

Allowing nonprofits to engage in partisan politics would:



Undermine Public Trust

Nonprofits are seen as neutral, community-serving organizations. Partisan endorsements would divide supporters, alienate clients, and erode credibility.



Politicize Community Services

When vital services are viewed as politically affiliated, it puts up invisible barriers. A food shelf perceived as partisan could make people hesitate to walk in—at the exact moment they need support the most.



Jeopardize Donations and Volunteer Support

People support nonprofits because they believe in the mission. If political endorsements enter the picture, that trust could erode—along with critical funding and volunteer engagement.



Create Legal and Operational Confusion

Allowing partisan activity would create a tangle of legal gray areas, putting small, community-based nonprofits at the greatest risk of missteps and penalties.

Nonprofits Already Engage in Public Policy - Legally and Effectively

Remaining nonpartisan does **not** mean staying silent. Nonprofits regularly advocate for issues like housing, healthcare, and education—informing lawmakers and shaping better policy. They do this **without endorsing candidates**.

Threats to Nonprofit Nonpartisanship

Efforts have been made to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment (the legislation signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1954 to protect nonprofit nonpartisanship) by Executive Order, stand-alone legislation, or attachment to must-pass legislation such as appropriations bills.

Specifically, the Free Speech Fairness Act ([S.1205/H.R. 2501](#)), has been regularly introduced in Congress.

Our Ask to Congress



Defend “the Johnson Amendment” - the long-standing federal law that protects nonprofit nonpartisanship



Resist efforts to politicize charitable organizations— nonprofits must remain spaces where people of all backgrounds are supported, welcomed, and heard.



Recognize the unique role of nonprofits in bridging divides, strengthening democracy, and providing critical services, not contributing to political polarization.

About Kentucky Nonprofit Network (KNN)

KNN was founded in 2002 and exists to strengthen and advance the Commonwealth’s nonprofit organizations through quality education; sharing of nonprofit management recommended practices and resources, time and money-saving member benefits; and a unified public policy voice for its 1,000+ member nonprofits. Nonprofit organizations are critical to Kentucky’s quality of life and also serve as an important economic engine, employing one in 10 of the state’s private sector workforce.



Learn more about KNN at
www.kynonprofits.org



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