

Opposition Witness Statement on HB 514 (2026)
Keeping Charities Nonpartisan Act of 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joe Ahn and I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to **HB 514 (2026)**, the *Keeping Charities Nonpartisan Act of 2026*, currently before the Maryland House of Delegates.

While the bill is presented as a safeguard for nonprofit integrity, it raises serious constitutional concerns regarding religious liberty and the historic limits placed on government authority over religious institutions.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” From the founding era, this dual protection was understood to create a firm boundary between civil authority and ecclesiastical governance. In 1802, Thomas Jefferson described this principle as building “a wall of separation between Church & State.” That wall was intended not merely to prevent the church from controlling the state, but equally to prevent the state from intruding into the internal life, doctrine, and moral speech of religious bodies.

HB 514 would authorize state officials to evaluate whether certain speech or activities by charitable and religious organizations cross into prohibited political conduct, with the penalty of revoking tax-exempt status. For houses of worship and faith-based ministries, moral teaching often intersects with public policy questions. Granting the state authority to scrutinize and penalize such expression risks entangling government with religious doctrine and internal governance—precisely what the Establishment Clause was designed to prevent.

The original intent of the separation of church and state was to create an unbreachable barrier protecting religious institutions from governmental interference. Conditioning tax-exempt status on state approval of religious speech or perceived political implications threatens that protection and may chill constitutionally protected free exercise and free expression.

Regardless of one’s view on nonprofit political activity, any law that expands state oversight into the expressive or doctrinal sphere of religious organizations must be approached with the utmost caution. HB 514 moves Maryland toward increased governmental entanglement with religious life, contrary to our constitutional heritage.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to give HB 514 an unfavorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.