



BLACKROCK CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Come together here.

RE:HB514 – SUPPORT

February 6, 2026

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Hecklinger. I am a lifelong Montgomery County resident, a Germantown neighbor, and the Chief Executive Officer of BlackRock Center for the Arts, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving thousands of Maryland residents each year through performances, exhibitions, arts education, and community-based programming.

I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill 4, which would prohibit charitable organizations from participating in or intervening in partisan political campaigns and establish a state safeguard should federal protections be weakened or eliminated.

The Trump Administration is attempting to weaken or eliminate the federal Johnson Amendment, a policy that for more than seven decades has protected 501(c)(3) nonprofits from being pulled into partisan candidate politics. Named for then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, this amendment created a clear firewall that shields charities from pressure to engage in divisive politics or serve as vehicles for political influence. I support HB514 because it preserves that essential nonpartisan guardrail here in Maryland if federal protections are rolled back—ensuring charitable organizations remain trusted, community-centered, and focused on mission rather than campaigns.

At BlackRock Center for the Arts, our work depends on public trust. We serve a politically diverse community and intentionally create space for people to gather across differences. That work is only possible when our audiences, donors, educators, and partners are confident that charitable resources are not being used to advance or oppose political candidates. HB514 reinforces that trust by maintaining the longstanding separation between charitable activity and partisan politics. From BlackRock’s perspective, we support the goal of keeping charities nonpartisan, while also being clear-eyed about how this legislation affects community-based organizations in practice.

For an arts center like BlackRock—one that operates a public facility, hosts hundreds of community events, and serves families, students, and seniors—the consequences outlined in this bill are significant. The loss of property or sales tax exemptions is not a technical penalty; it directly affects our ability to keep doors open, keep programs affordable, and continue serving the community. When the stakes are this high, enforcement must be carefully calibrated and proportional.



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Nonprofits like BlackRock Center for the Arts operate within complex ecosystems. We host outside groups, collaborate with artists and educators, and rely on volunteers and partners. It is essential to distinguish between intentional, authorized partisan activity and situations where something occurs without authorization and is promptly corrected. Without that distinction, well-intentioned organizations may pull back from community engagement altogether.

At the end of the day, BlackRock’s work—and the work of nonprofits across Maryland—is about bringing people together across differences. We want to preserve public trust, protect the nonprofit sector, and ensure that legislation meant to safeguard integrity does not unintentionally weaken the very institutions that hold our communities together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Hecklinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a thin horizontal line.

Katie Hecklinger
Chief Executive Officer
BlackRock Center for the Arts