

February 16, 2026

To the Economic Matters Committee:

I am writing to urge you to give an unfavorable review of HB514: Charitable Organizations – Charitable Donation and Tax-Exempt Status – Revocation (Keeping Charities Nonpartisan Act of 2026).

This bill seeks to authorize the Secretary of State and Attorney General to levy financial penalties and to revoke the tax-exempt status of charitable organizations that “participate in or intervene in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate for public office” including through “publication or distribution of statements.”

While approved activities of charitable organizations includes the “advancement of religion” this bill seeks to artificially bifurcate public life from religious convictions. Religious faith is not simply the acceptance of abstract ideas that are disconnected and isolated from the policies and governmental institutions that impact the real lives of Marylanders.

Politics is an intrinsically moral institution because all law is based on what ought and what ought not to be done in society. Therefore, politics unavoidably intersects with religious beliefs that also address moral questions. To Marylanders from a variety of faiths, policies regarding abortion, sexuality and gender, the family, education, stewardship of the environment, stewardship of financial resources, and care for the poor are not merely political issues that can be debated in a neutral public square, but fundamentally moral issues that have often been politicized through partisan divides. The idea of a neutral secular public square is also a myth since secularism is based on a specific worldview with its own set of metaphysical and moral assumptions and convictions.

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote:

*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)*

Christian leaders and organizations cannot fully exercise their faith by merely holding certain convictions but failing to take concrete action. This action may include specifically connecting their religious beliefs to the proposed policies or past actions of specific candidates for political office and sharing these views through official written or oral statements. A Christian pastor is responsible for the shepherding of the people under his

care, which includes encouraging them to not only mentally ascent to the correct moral beliefs, but to do specific works in response to their beliefs and convictions. This bill would seek to interfere in the ability of pastors to teach, disciple, and lead the people under their care by directly teaching them how religious life intersects with political decisions and actions.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Christian political engagement is not a merely partisan activity. Politics matters because policy matters. Policy matters because people matter. Politics influences policy which impacts people. Christian engagement in politics is a response to the second greatest commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. Christians cannot love their neighbor and ignore how policies impact their neighbors’ lives. Policies are enacted by candidates for political office with specific policy goals and agendas. Christians cannot ignore how public elections could positively or negatively impact their neighbors and communities.

These points do not apply solely to the Christian pastor. They also apply to the priest, the rabbi and the imam. They apply to leaders and organizations that hold convictions that align more closely with conservative political views and to leaders and organizations that hold convictions that align more closely with liberal political views. The point is that this bill and the State of Maryland will be infringing on the First Amendment rights of the free exercise of religion because it will impede religious leaders from fully living out their religious convictions by speaking plainly about moral issues and from disciplining and leading the people in their care. The principle of separation of church and state was established not to protect the state from the church, but to protect the church from the state. This bill will illegitimately seek to use state power to control the church.

As a result, to respect the First Amendment rights of all Marylanders and to protect a free and open public square that permits opinions and statements from a diverse range of worldviews, I urge you to issue an unfavorable review for HB 514.

Sincerely,

Justin Kuk

*Baltimore, Maryland*