



# AMERICAN ATHEISTS

February 11, 2026

The Honorable Sen. Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21404

**Re: SUPPORT SB 4, Protecting the Democratic Process**

Dear Chairperson Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 1,500 constituents in Maryland, thanks you for holding a hearing on SB 4, a proposal to enact Maryland's version of the Johnson Amendment. When properly enforced, the Johnson Amendment keeps tax-exempt organizations — including charities, schools, churches, and other houses of worship — from engaging in electoral campaigns. With federal enforcement under threat, SB 4 would give Maryland the tools it needs to stop organizations meant to provide vital community services from making those services contingent on how a member of that community voted. Maryland must remain a state governed by the people and for the people — not by special interest groups, for special interest groups. We urge you to swiftly pass this legislation.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building, and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists believes preserving democracy requires strict enforcement of the constitutional principle that religion and government remain in separate spheres to preserve the integrity of both.

**AMERICAN ATHEISTS**

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The Johnson Amendment has been settled law since 1954 because Congress determined that nonprofit organizations, including those with religious motivations, should devote themselves to educational, charitable, and communal purposes rather than partisan political activity. The Amendment prohibits nonprofit organizations registered under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from endorsing or opposing any person running for elected office. It applies to all entities that form for religious, charitable, literary, scientific, or educational purposes and offers significant benefits to these organizations such as tax exemptions for the organization and tax-deductible status for its donors' contributions. In return for these privileges, entities that voluntarily seek 501(c)(3) status are required to abide by reasonable government regulations, including the Johnson Amendment.

Because the current federal government has signaled its unwillingness to enforce the Johnson Amendment, it is critical that the Maryland legislature enact strong safeguards through measures like SB 4. Without strict enforcement, donors could pressure nonprofit organizations, including churches, into endorsing their favored candidates in exchange for financial support. To be clear, the Johnson Amendment does not silence churches on political matters. Houses of worship may provide members with nonpartisan information regarding an election, organize voter registration drives, host candidates as speakers provided that each candidate is given an equal opportunity to speak, and hold discussions about the relationship between church doctrine and ballot issues. This balance has permitted churches to help their congregations engage as informed participants in the democratic process without compelling houses of worship to engage in partisan electioneering.

Unless SB 4 is passed, houses of worship throughout Maryland may be coerced into abandoning their longstanding neutrality by outside interests offering financial support contingent on partisan endorsements. As a result, church officials who would rather remain neutral may be pressured to endorse or oppose political candidates; congregations may be divided by partisan disputes that have no place in a house of worship; and campaign financiers would seek to commandeer the trust that congregations place in their religious leaders to serve political agendas rather than the best interests of congregants.

SB 4 is a straightforward measure to preserve a protection Marylanders have relied on for over 70 years. It ensures that houses of worship can continue to serve their congregations' spiritual and community needs without being conscripted into

partisan politics by special interest groups. The legislature has both the authority and the obligation to fill the gap left by the federal government through enacting this legislation. We urge you to pass SB 4 and ensure that Maryland's houses of worship remain protected.

Should you have any questions regarding American Atheists' support for SB 4, please contact me at [vanderson@atheists.org](mailto:vanderson@atheists.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "V".

Victoria Anderson  
State Policy Specialist  
American Atheists