



March 19, 2020

Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your hard work to serve our country during this extraordinary crisis we face as a country. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every area of American life—our health, our communities, our economy, and our sense of connectedness and belonging. We know how seriously you take this crisis and the demands that this moment has placed on you, your families, and your staff. Thank you for doing all you can for our country.

I write to express a particular concern for the impact of COVID-19 on the charitable sector. I am gravely concerned about the future of the nonprofit organizations that serve the most vulnerable members of our society, and our churches and houses of worship, which provide hope and community to people who are hurting and searching for meaning during this difficult season.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 will be dramatic across all sectors of our economy, which will in turn impact charitable contributions to nonprofit organizations. Without dramatic action, many of these nonprofits will be forced to close their doors. **I am writing to ask you to take bold action to encourage our communities to come together to support the nonprofits and charities that make our communities thrive.**

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 doubled the standard deduction, which means that most Americans no longer itemize their deductions. Under the federal tax code, people can only

claim a deduction for charitable contributions if they itemize their deductions. Since the amount of people who itemize deductions has shrunk, many nonprofits are concerned there would be a drop in donations, because of the lack of incentive to give. The Charitable Deduction is the only deduction for which the taxpayer receives no other material benefit (compared with the mortgage interest deduction or tuition deduction).

Southern Baptists affirm tax policies that incentivize charitable giving. Both families and government hold an interest in charitable giving so that the voluntary sector of our nation realizes its fullest potential. The institutions of a healthy civil society—houses of worship, poverty relief, education, the arts, and more—depend on charitable giving. Therefore, we object to any tax policy that would have a chilling effect on charitable giving. We urge Congress to extend the Charitable Deduction to 100% of taxpayers, not just those who itemize.

I am calling for a two-year Universal Charitable Deduction (UCD) to encourage giving to charities to mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A UCD would incentivize all taxpayers, not just those in upper income brackets who itemize their deductions. Our government should welcome the generosity of all citizens—at all levels of income—who desire to help their neighbors through religious associations, educational institutions, and any organization that relieves poverty. Currently, there is bipartisan legislation that would allow above-the-line deductions for individuals not itemizing. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Russell Moore
President
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission