

# ERLC urges support for nonprofits and vulnerable

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission called on Congress to support nonprofit organizations and particular categories of vulnerable Americans in the next COVID-19 relief package.



Russell Moore

ERLC President Russell Moore wrote congressional leaders May 7 to ask them to include provisions such as a Universal Charitable Deduction in what is known as the Phase 4 legislation under consideration in response to the economic loss brought on by the pandemic. The ERLC has been championing the UCD since March, but Congress did not include it in a previous package.

The ERLC and other organizations have expressed concerns the pandemic will reduce giving to churches and nonprofits, which could lead some to permanently shut down. Many churches in the country have not met in person since the third or fourth Sunday in March.

“Churches and charities are themselves ravaged by the public health and economic crisis we are facing even as they are also at the forefront of

helping the vulnerable, the sick and the poor,” Moore said in a May 8 news release.

“Government should do everything possible to remove obstacles to the thriving of civil society,” he said. “This next step should remove such obstacles from these organizations helping the most at-risk populations. The recommendations in this letter can do that.”

In his letter, Moore called for an unlimited UCD that would be retroactive to 2019 and extend through 2020 and 2021. A UCD would “incentivize all taxpayers to give to nonprofits and charities,” and would “help mitigate the economic impacts” of the pandemic, he told congressional leaders.

The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which doubled the standard deduction, resulted in most Americans no longer itemizing their deductions and causing a corresponding concern among nonprofits that charitable giving would decline, Moore wrote.

## **GuideStone urges action to help churches**

GuideStone Financial Resources, the SBC’s health and financial benefits entity, also called for federal action to help churches and ministries during the pandemic.



O.S. Hawkins

GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins said when previous legislation was under consideration, the entity wrote the Trump administration “to advocate for our churches and their needs during these historic days. We are monitoring and will speak in support of legislation that will benefit churches and pastors alongside our Southern Baptist partners and the Church Alliance,” a broad coalition of denominational benefit boards.

The ERLC and other nonprofits endorsed May 7 a letter led by Sens. James Lankford, R-Okla., and Angus King, I-Maine, that urged Senate leadership not to forget nonprofits and houses of worship in the next relief bill. Joined by a bipartisan group of 28 other senators, they requested provisions to encourage charitable giving and enlarge unemployment insurance repayments for nonprofit workers.

When Moore’s March 19 call for a UCD in a previous Senate relief package failed to gain inclusion, he endorsed an amendment by Lankford.

Lankford’s amendment would have boosted the cap on the charitable giving deduction from \$300 to one-third of the standard deduction, which would be \$4,000 for a person filing individually and \$8,000 for a married couple filing jointly. Lankford’s amendment was not included in the final bill.

Moore also urged Congress in his [May 7 letter](#) to approve:

- A “nonprofit charity grant program” that would aid workers at religious charities.
- A tax deduction retroactive to 2018 for part of tuition costs at non-public elementary and secondary schools, thereby potentially providing relief to public schools that may face an overwhelming increase in enrollment.
- Changes in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—a federal, anti-hunger effort—to help families with a new need to access SNAP and to expand the online program so the elderly poor

especially may stay safe at home when purchasing food.

- A moratorium on young people from 18 to 21 aging out of foster care so they can remain in a safe living arrangement.
- Expansion of “compassionate release” from prison to protect higher-risk inmates during the pandemic.

Moore’s May 7 letter went to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy in the House of Representatives, as well as Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Charles Schumer in the Senate.