



INTERFAITH ALLIANCE

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

President

Rabbi Jack Moline

Board of Directors

Jacob Worenklein, Chair
New York, NY

Julie Cloud
Southlake, TX

Rev. Dr. David Currie
San Angelo, TX

Helio Fred Garcia
New York, NY

Iqbal G. Mamdani
Naples, FL

Robert Meyers
Alexandria, VA

Bishop Carlton Pearson
San Diego, CA

Skye Perryman
Washington, DC

Simran Singh Stuelpnagel
Washington, DC

Claudia Wiegand
Treasurer
Washington, DC

Tom Uhlman
New York, NY

President Emeritus

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
Monroe, LA

Founding President

Dr. Herbert Valentine
Perryville, MD

Past Honorary Chair

Walter Cronkite

Past Board Chairs

Denise T. Davidoff
Rt. Rev. Jane Holmes Dixon

Alex Forger Esq.

Arun Gandhi

Helio Fred Garcia

Rev. Galen Guengerich

Rev. Dr. Gwynne M. Guibord

Amber Khan

Rabbi Jack Moline

Rev. Dr. Albert Pennybacker

Rev. Dr. J. Phillip Wogaman

Foy Valentine

Dr. Herbert D. Valentine

October 22, 2021

Governor Terry McAuliffe
c/o Chris Bolling
Terry for Virginia
Via email: cbolling@terrymcauliffe.com

Dear Governor McAuliffe:

Voter turnout is critical in the final days of this campaign, when so much hangs in the balance for our Commonwealth. And yet recent reports of a planned strategy to use worship services to screen videos from high profile surrogates raises serious concerns regarding the politicization of religious communities and potential violations of federal tax restrictions on 501(c)(3) organizations.

I write to you today as the president of Interfaith Alliance, a national policy and advocacy group that works to advance an inclusive vision of religious freedom, and as a longtime resident of Virginia. I have worked and raised my family here, volunteering my personal time and energy to support candidates and officials whose values I share. It was a distinct privilege to accept your appointment in 2017 to serve as co-chair of the Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion during your first term as governor.

I have also served as a congregational rabbi for nearly four decades and witnessed the profound ways that houses of worship enrich in the public and private lives of my fellow Virginians. By providing religious, moral, and communal resources to their members, these institutions enhance the quality of life for participants and the communities in which they operate. And in this particular moment, as so many mourn the loss of loved ones and grapple with isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, they remain an enduring source of strength in challenging times.

Religious conviction and care for one another can inspire powerful political action. And yet I have never endorsed a candidate for public office from the pulpit, even when members of my own congregation were running. Why? Because it's one thing to organize congregants to *get out the vote* - and something quite different to tell them *who to vote for*.

This week, CNN and others reported that more than 300 historically Black churches plan to show a video message from Vice President Kamala Harris in their morning worship services that aims to drive turnout for your campaign ahead of Election Day.¹ If this reporting is correct, this effort is an egregious violation of the separation of religion and government and jeopardizes the tax-exempt status of hundreds of houses of worship throughout the Commonwealth.

Out of respect for the essential role that religious institutions play in the Commonwealth and in recognition of the federal tax code prohibition on partisan politicking from the pulpit, I urge the McAuliffe campaign to cancel all plans to screen endorsement videos during worship services.



INTERFAITH ALLIANCE

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

In 1954, Congress approved an amendment to the federal tax code to prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations, including houses of worship, from engaging in political campaign activity. This ban became known as the Johnson Amendment and has only been strengthened over time through congressional and regulatory action. The Internal Revenue Service is clear that these institutions “must not participate in, or intervene in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office” - including showing favor toward or explicit endorsement of a candidate.² Should they do so, houses of worship risk losing their tax exempt status.³

Partisan politicking not only sows division in our congregations, but endangers the financial wellbeing of these essential institutions. The McAuliffe campaign can accomplish its goals, partner with community stakeholders to get out the vote, *and* ensure all parties involved abide by the tax code. But to do so, the campaign must call off this particular effort.

Respectfully,

Rabbi Jack Moline
President, Interfaith Alliance

¹ Eva McKend and Dan Merica, *McAuliffe fights to engage politically exhausted Democrats in close of Virginia campaign*, CNN, Oct. 16, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/16/politics/democrats-virginia-mcauliffe-governor/index.html>.

² Tax Guide for Churches & Religious Organizations, I.R.S. Pub. 1828, Cat. 21096G at 4 (revised Aug. 2015), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>.

³ Vote 2020: A Campaign Season Guide for Houses of Worship, Interfaith Alliance Foundation, <https://interfaithalliance.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/06/2020-house-of-worship-booklet.pdf>.