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Charitable giving is worth protecting

Warren W. Hyer

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Phil was an angry young man. There were severe problems in family relationships at home and he was getting into trouble in the courts due to drug abuse and other issues. Even though he had just completed high school early and was working, he was in serious trouble.

The Central Ohio Symphony developed the therapeutic drumming program in partnership with mental health and recovery services provider Maryhaven and the Delaware County Juvenile Court to help juveniles like Phil. The program is a unique and valuable outlet that relieves stress, hastens recovery and develops a positive path for a young person's future. It is so successful that the Symphony's drumming program has been made a part of the treatment program now mandated by the courts.

It has been shown that by providing an effective outlet such as the drumming program, youth are more likely to stay out of trouble and succeed in school and employment. By identifying and addressing the underlying treatment issues early, further involvement in the court system and, in some cases, incarceration can be avoided, says Steve Hedge, Executive Director of the Delaware Morrow Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

Phil and those in the drumming program are not the only ones experiencing stress: the drumming program itself, while providing documented value to our community, is also under stress. It can only operate through funding, and if funding gets cut, this low cost-beneficial program will also get cut.

As lawmakers in Washington, D.C., work to reform America's tax code and address our fiscal crisis, America's nonprofit sector faces a serious threat. Congress is considering limits on the charitable tax deduction – a proposition that would devastate the nonprofit sector millions rely on for services, jobs and support.

Harmful changes would set off a cascade of consequences undermining our economy, hitting hardest those who need the most help, and putting at risk billions in private donations that support diverse, worthy causes. As we enter this season of "giving," it is critical to understand how essential charitable gifts are to the health and vitality of our community and state.

The Symphony's drumming program was developed here in Delaware County to serve a community need. It helps young people make a turn in their lives, finish school, learn to be drug free, and function as

productive citizens. We hope many more youth will benefit in the future.

Certainly, the government is not going to step in and provide the valuable services provided by the many non-profits that serve our community. Our community can serve our community best and with greater value, supported by charitable giving.

A strong nonprofit sector is important to a lasting economic recovery.

Nonprofit programs rely significantly – and in many cases entirely – on private donations. Charitable giving – and the charitable deduction – represents a lifeline to individuals and communities in need, generating nationally more than \$1 trillion every year in the form of jobs and services. One in 10 Americans works for a nonprofit organization, accounting for approximately 13.7 million jobs receiving roughly 9 percent of wages paid in the U.S.

The Central Ohio Symphony receives nearly 60 percent of its operating funds through charitable giving, a figure that is similar for most nonprofits in our area.

Americans support the charitable deduction because it works.

For nearly 100 years, the charitable deduction has served as the bedrock of our altruistic society and is a model for the world. The benefit encourages individuals to give away a portion of their income to help those in need and support worthy causes. These causes include educational, social, environmental, health, and the arts. It encourages Americans to make charitable contributions – more often and in larger amounts – than they might do otherwise. There are dozens of nonprofits here in Delaware County that serve the both the young and older citizens, and in fact touch everyone's life. They all depend on charitable deductions to provide these services.

According to Giving USA, those who itemized their charitable contributions made up 81 percent of the total estimate (nearly \$229 billion) of giving by individuals in 2012. For every dollar a donor gets in tax relief for his or her donation, the public typically receives three dollars of benefit.

The Symphony's therapeutic drumming program is funded 100 percent through charitable donations. Tax dollars are not involved. It is our gift to the community and we hope to be able to expand it to serve more in our community. If these nonprofit services are no longer funded for these youth, the government would need to fund programs or perhaps put the youth in jail at tremendous cost.

In Delaware, juveniles like Phil in the treatment court program look forward to their drumming sessions as a way to overcome the stress of their daily lives, continue to stay off drugs and build on their positive progress. And Phil? He has graduated from the court program and has a new job doing checkout at a local store I visited last week. He said he was doing fine and this new job was much better and paid better than his old one. He was making great progress on his own.

With the myriad of proposals to reform America's tax code and fix our budget problems, surely there are better solutions than tampering with the charitable tax deduction. We must work together to find them.

Warren W. Hyer is Executive Director of the Central Ohio Symphony.

