

Bond
Society Building
8 All Saints Street
London
N1 9RL

15 June 2017

The Rt Hon Damian Green MP
First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Dear Secretary of State,

Part II of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014

Congratulations on your appointment as First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office. As leaders of representative and infrastructure bodies for the domestic and international charity sector in the UK, we look forward to working with you in your new role. We are writing to ask the Government to bring forward urgently much needed changes to Part II of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, also known as the Lobbying Act.

Charities are a vital part of a healthy democracy. They contribute to informed policy debates, speak up on behalf of vulnerable and marginalised people, and support the public to engage in the democratic process. The Charity Commission, Electoral Commission, and the House of Lords Select Committee on Charities all recognise that campaigning is legitimate, valuable and normal part of what charities do. It is critical that charities can continue to perform this important role in the run up to elections.

While we recognise that regulation is necessary to ensure that no one individual or organisation can exert undue influence at an election, the Lobbying Act has had a disproportionate impact on charity campaigning. This is despite the fact that, unlike organisations from many other sectors, charities are already subject to strict limitations on their political activity under charity law.

The excessive and unreasonable red tape the Lobbying Act places on charities made it harder for them to campaign at the 2017 General Election. Charities also find many of the non-party campaigning rules ambiguous. We are concerned that this caused many charities not to engage, resulting in some important voices being lost from public debate.

A Government-commissioned review of the Part II of the Lobbying Act, conducted by the Conservative peer, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts, found that it fails to get the balance right and proposed several changes to the legislation. The House of Lords Select Committee on Charities described his recommendations as "eminently sensible" and called on the Government to implement them "in full".

We are writing to you following the publication of the reports from both the House of Lords Select Committee on Charities and Lord Hodgson, to request a meeting to discuss how the sector can work with the Cabinet Office to implement Lord Hodgson's recommendations. Whilst some of our organisations remain of the view that the best course of action would be to repeal the Lobbying Act entirely, we are all keen to ensure that at the very least its unintended consequences can be minimised.

The Lobbying Act is a confusing and burdensome piece of legislation that ultimately harms our democracy, rather than strengthens it. We hope that the Government will devote sufficient parliamentary time to ensure that revisions are made, which enable organisations to continue campaigning on issues that relate directly to their charitable objects at elections.

Yours sincerely,



John Barrett
Chief Executive
Small Charities Coalition



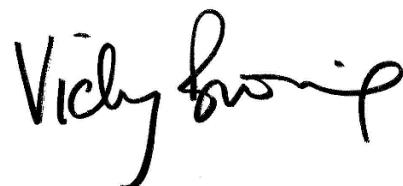
Neil Cleeveley
Chief Executive
NAVCA (National Association for
Voluntary and Community Action)



Tamsyn Barton
Chief Executive
Bond



Sir Stuart Etherington
Chief Executive
NCVO



Vicky Browning
Chief Executive
ACEVO



Dr John Low CBE
Chief Executive
Charities Aid Foundation

CC: Mr Chris Skidmore MP, Parliamentary Secretary (Minister for the Constitution)