



A volunteer helps customers shop for free food in early June, in Grove City, Ohio. In 2024, the nonprofit fed more than half a million people — enough to fill Ohio Stadium five times, guest columnist Jarrod A. Clabaugh writes.

Mid-Ohio Food Collective via AP

COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

Nonprofits enhance Ohioans' lives. Taxing them would be a huge error

Jarrod A. Clabaugh

This year I joined nonprofit and association leaders from across the country in speaking with members of the U.S. Senate and House, particularly those from Ohio. The many misconceptions about nonprofits soon became clear. One such misconception was the notion that new taxes — intended to offset the extension of soon-expiring tax cuts in a 2018 law — could come at the expense of nonprofits. That should never be the case.

Legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill initially included several provisions that would have significantly impacted tax-exempt organizations. Thanks to sustained advocacy efforts, the Senate removed some of the most harmful elements of the bill. However, the legislation remains under review, and nonprofits are watching closely. The tax-exempt status of nonprofits is not a loophole — it is a recognition of the essential services these organizations provide all Americans.

During our meetings, we heard concerns that nonprofits may express values that don't always align with certain political views, or that they compete unfairly with for-profit businesses. However, once we shared examples of the impact associations have on public safety, education, and economic development, many of these perceptions began to shift.

A representative from the Ohio Trucking Association explained how member training programs lead to safer driving behavior, helping protect both truck drivers and the motorists with whom they share the roads. This training also ensures that goods, materials, and essential supplies make it safely to businesses, factories, and grocery-store shelves.

Another delegation member highlighted how the American Society for Non-destructive Testing educates professionals to safeguard the integrity of everything from consumer products to the infrastructure we rely on daily — bridges, roadways, airplanes, and automobiles. These efforts literally help save lives and keep our country moving safely and efficiently.

Stories like these demonstrated to lawmakers that nonprofits and associations

are not driven by political ideology — they are driven by their missions.

When we met with U.S. Rep. Mike Carey, of Columbus, a member of the House Ways & Means Committee, he acknowledged the essential role that Ohio's associations play in strengthening communities. He affirmed his support for the services that nonprofit organizations provide to Ohioans and recognized that these groups offer stability in uncertain times.

Our delegation also emphasized how nonprofits help alleviate pressure on local, state, and federal programs by providing vital services to constituents who often have nowhere else to turn. If nonprofits were to lose their tax-exempt status or face additional financial burdens, the resulting gap in services would be devastating to all communities.

Consider the Mid-Ohio Food Collective, which in 2024 fed more than half a million people — enough to fill Ohio Stadium five times. It also served nearly 2.8 million meals through community programs and distributed nearly 85 million pounds of food.

Another powerful example is the Brecksville-based Precision Machined Products Association. This organization trains and upskills workers across evolving industrial fields. Within hours of the COVID-19 pandemic being declared, its members pivoted to produce critical medical components to save lives.

These stories reflect just a fraction of the work being done by nonprofits — work made possible because these organizations operate under a tax-exempt status that allows them to focus on mission over margin.

In today's environment — marked by higher inflation, shrinking government budgets, and growing uncertainty — tax-exempt nonprofits are doing more with less. They are stepping in where government programs cannot. If the government seeks to scale back social services, it cannot simultaneously undermine the organizations that are filling the gaps.

The answer is simple: Nonprofits must be allowed — and empowered — to continue their work without the burden of additional taxation.

Jarrod A. Clabaugh is president & CEO of the Ohio Society of Association Professionals.