

The United States House of Representatives

Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee, Hearing on Tax Reform  
and Charitable Contributions

Testimony of Scott D. Ferguson

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Georgia

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Chairman Camp, Ranking Member Levin, Members of the Committee, I am Scott Ferguson, President & CEO of United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley in Columbus, Georgia. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of not only, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley, but on behalf of the entire United Way system of over 1,200 local United Ways.

Our United Way in Columbus is comprised of partner organizations and donors from seven counties in Georgia and one in Alabama. I am fortunate to lead a successful charitable organization that receives donations from more than 20,000 individuals annually.

United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley is committed to providing essential funding to local non-profit organizations that will assist over 100,000 individuals and families this year. United Way volunteers invest money in local programs that demonstrate Need, Stewardship and Results.

Our United Way has also been entrusted to oversee and implement The City of Columbus' 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness which is called, "Home for Good." Our local Housing Authority recently secured a Moving to Work HUD designation that will allow the two programs to begin looking at permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals in our community. Currently an anonymous donor is considering making a seven figure donation to us to provide housing units. I am sure that the charitable deduction plays an influential role when donors consider how much they are able to invest in critical programs like home for good.

United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley is also focused on teaching our youth the importance of giving back. The Live United Youth Council is a student-led community change organization for high school students. Youth Council members raise and allocate funds for local non-profit organizations. Members gain valuable leadership skills, as well as, learn about non-profits

through volunteer projects. United Way, with a grant from Aflac, also hosts a three-day Live United Youth Camp for seventh grade students. The camp is focused on teaching students about United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley's four impact areas: Basic Needs, Income, Health and Education through volunteer projects, speakers and tours.

United Way is an active partner with our local VITA Coalition, which offers Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs throughout our area. Last year this program allowed us to put more than \$3 million back into the hands of people living and working in our community.

We currently fund 50 programs through 26 non-profit agencies that serve our eight county region. Programs that provide credit counseling, basic needs that we may take for granted like, food, clothing and shelter as well as youth programs that help children stay in school and advance in life.

In a recent Chronicle of Philanthropy study the Columbus, GA area ranked as 23<sup>rd</sup> most generous location of 366 metropolitan areas. I would have to agree with that study. The Chattahoochee Valley region, including the City of Columbus, GA and Phenix City, AL, is extremely generous and supportive of all non-profit organizations. The area is widely known for successful public-private partnerships that make our area a great place to work and live. Our United Way is on track to have the largest fundraising campaign in our organization's history, with nearly a 4% increase in contributions. I can assure you that our economy in the Chattahoochee Valley, like many communities across the nation, continues to struggle. Despite economic challenges that people and businesses in our community are facing, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley will raise nearly \$7.7 million dollars.

As the second largest funder of local social service organizations, only behind government, I am absolutely convinced that we must preserve the charitable deduction as it is in the federal tax code and oppose any limitations on charitable deductions.

We would all like to believe that people give because they trust our organization and it is the right thing to do. We must also be practical and realize that many, if not the majority of gifts to any nonprofit, have the charitable deduction as a strong incentive.

The United Way opposes any limitations to the charitable deduction for any donor. Given the impending government cuts to critical education and

human service programs, Congress should be looking for ways to expand incentives for private charitable giving.

Thank you.