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Ms Tracey Crouch MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil  
Society  
Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

29 August 2017

Dear Minister,

### **Enhancing civil society participation in the democratic process**

Congratulations upon your appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society. We are writing to you, as organisations for whom campaigning is fundamental to achieving our mission, to express our concerns regarding the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, also known as the Lobbying Act, and its impact on the ability of civil society to participate in the democratic process.

Civil society is a vital part of a healthy democracy. It has a long and proud tradition of campaigning in the UK, and has been the driving force behind many of our great social reforms, from the abolition of slavery to the extension of the franchise to women. In more recent times, charities and non-partisan campaign groups have worked with parliamentarians from across the political spectrum to achieve equal marriage and tackle modern slavery.

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 civil society campaigning. We are concerned that it caused many organisations not to engage in the run up to the recent general election, and resulted in some important voices being lost from public debate.

Charities and non-partisan campaign groups have spent significant time attempting to understand the legislation and how to comply. However, many of the rules are vague and confusing, especially for smaller organisations. While some organisations have sought legal advice to help them interpret the legislation, this can be expensive and is simply not an option for many. The rules on joint campaigning are also a concern for smaller charities, and have made organisations more hesitant to collaborate.

A Government-commissioned review of the Part II of the Lobbying Act, conducted by the Conservative peer, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, 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 as the Minister responsible for civil society, to ask you to work with your colleagues in the Cabinet Office to ensure sufficient parliamentary time is devoted to allow revisions to be made, which would protect and enhance the ability of civil society to engage in the democratic process.

The Lobbying Act is a confusing and burdensome piece of legislation that weakens our democracy, rather than strengthens it. We look forward to working with you in your new role to ensure that much-needed changes are made to this law.

Yours sincerely,



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Director of Operations  
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