



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. BISHOPS VOW TO FIGHT HHS EDICT

**Unconscionable to force citizens to buy contraceptives against their will
No change in limited exemption, only delay in enforcement
Matter of freedom of conscience, freedom of religion**

WASHINGTON—The Catholic bishops of the United States called “literally unconscionable” a decision by the Obama Administration to continue to demand that sterilization, abortifacients and contraception be included in virtually all health plans. Today’s announcement means that this mandate and its very narrow exemption will not change at all; instead there will only be a delay in enforcement against some employers.

In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences,” said Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The cardinal-designate continued, “To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable. It is as much an attack on access to health care as on religious freedom. Historically this represents a challenge and a compromise of our religious liberty.”

The HHS rule requires that sterilization and contraception – including controversial abortifacients – be included among “preventive services” coverage in almost every healthcare plan available to Americans. “The government should not force Americans to act as if pregnancy is a disease to be prevented at all costs,” added Cardinal-designate Dolan.

At issue, the U.S. bishops and other religious leaders insist, is the survival of a cornerstone constitutionally protected freedom that ensures respect for the conscience of Catholics and all other Americans.

“This is nothing less than a direct attack on religion and First Amendment rights,” said Franciscan Sister Jane Marie Klein, chairperson of the board at Franciscan Alliance, Inc., a system of 13 Catholic hospitals. “I have hundreds of employees who will be upset and confused by this edict. I cannot understand it at all.”

Daughter of Charity Sister Carol Keehan, president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, voiced disappointment with the decision. Catholic hospitals serve one out of six people who seek hospital care annually.

This was a missed opportunity to be clear on appropriate conscience protection,” Sister Keehan said.

Cardinal-designate Dolan urged that the HHS mandate be overturned.

“The Obama administration has now drawn an unprecedented line in the sand,” he said. “The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation. We will continue to study all the implications of this troubling decision.”

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