



FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE

ACTION ALERT

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Co-sponsor Respect for Rights of Conscience Act

On January 20, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reaffirmed a rule that virtually all private health care plans must cover sterilization, abortifacients, and contraception. The rule is set to take effect August 1, 2012. Non-profit religious employers that do not now provide such coverage, and are not exempt under the rule's extremely narrow definition of religious employer, will be given one year—until August 1, 2013—to comply.

Responding to the announcement, Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated: "In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences." Cardinal-designate Dolan continued: "To force Americans 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." Noting that the Obama administration "has now drawn an unprecedented line in the sand," the Cardinal-designate urged that the HHS mandate be overturned. "The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation." See: www.usccb.org/news/2012/12-012.cfm. For more information, see: www.usccb.org/conscience.

Last August, the HHS issued a list of "preventive services for women" to be mandated in almost all private health plans under the new health care law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). The mandated services include sterilization, all FDA-approved birth control (such as the IUD, Depo-Provera, 'morning-after' pills, and the abortion-inducing drug Ella), and "education and counseling" to promote these among all "women of reproductive capacity." HHS's interim final rule allowed only a very narrow exemption for a "religious employer." The January 20 announcement makes this interim rule final.

To correct the threats to religious liberty and rights of conscience posed by PPACA, the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act has been introduced in Congress (H.R. 1179, S. 1467). This measure will ensure that those who participate in the health care system "retain the right to provide, purchase, or enroll in health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions." It is more important than ever that Members of Congress be urged to co-sponsor this measure. For co-sponsors, please check **H.R. 1179** and **S. 1467** at: thomas.loc.gov.

ACTION: Contact your U.S. Representative and two Senators by e-mail, phone, or FAX letter:

- Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at: 202-224-3121, or call your Members' local offices.
- Send an e-mail through NCHLA's Grassroots Action Center at: nchla.org/actiondisplay.asp?ID=292.
- Additional contact info can be found on Members' web sites at: www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

MESSAGE: "Please co-sponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act (H.R. 1179, S. 1467). This measure ensures that the rights of conscience of all participants in our nation's health care system will be respected."

WHEN: Now is the time to build co-sponsors. Please act today! Thanks! Updated 1/24/12