



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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September 22, 2011

A Federal Challenge to Religious Liberty

Dear Friends,

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed a regulation that presents an unprecedented challenge to religious liberty. The public comment period on this rule ends September 30, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is encouraging Catholics to go to their website www.USCCB.org and click on "New Mandate Threatens Conscience Rights" to send an email to HHS urging our government leaders to ensure that such federal regulations do not violate Americans' moral and religious convictions. You may also find the link on our website www.bridgeportdiocese.com or The Bridge.

In implementing the new health care reform law, HHS issued a rule that would require private health care plans nationwide to cover contraception and sterilization as "preventive services" for women. The mandate includes abortifacients, which have the capacity to terminate a pregnancy in its early weeks. Never before has the federal government required private health plans to include such coverage.

The exception for religious institutions is so narrow that it covers almost no one. The proposed religious exemption would apply only to those institutions that primarily serve members of their faith community, exclude those of other faiths from their employment and focus solely on the inculcation of their religious beliefs.

For Catholic institutions this would mean that religious liberty is applicable only if a Catholic school, hospital or social service program hires primarily Catholics, serves primarily Catholics, and attempts to convert to Catholicism anyone who seeks these services. Yet through our schools, our hospitals and our vast array of social service programs, the Catholic Church, like most other religious organizations, serves all those who come to us in need and welcomes people of all faiths to our employment whenever possible. This new mandate would severely impede our ability to freely practice our religious beliefs in service to our neighbors. Most Catholic charitable institutions that serve the public would be ineligible for the exemption, in which case they either would be forced to provide health care coverage of drugs and procedures to which they have a moral objection or decline to offer health benefits to their employees.

I hope you will send your comments to HHS by the September 30 deadline to discourage this onerous infringement on religious freedom.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Bishop of Bridgeport