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This Number Should be Prefixed to Your Reply

Office of the Metropolitan

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The federal government, which claims to be “of, by, and for the people,” has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that almost all employers, *including Catholic employers*, will be *forced* to offer their employees’ health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be *forced* to include those “services” in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be *forced* to buy that coverage as a part of their policies.

In so ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation’s first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The Administration’s sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America’s cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God given rights. In generations past, the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

And therefore, I would ask of you two things. First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. Second, I would also recommend visiting www.usccb.org/conscience, to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty, and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Stefan Soroka

Metropolitan-Archbishop



PENNSYLVANIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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Conscience Rights Violated by Sweeping HHS Contraceptive Mandate

Take Action at www.pacatholic.org TODAY

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, abortion-causing drugs, and contraception.

The exemption provided for "religious employers" is so narrow that it fails to cover the vast majority of faith-based organizations, including Catholic hospitals, universities, and service organizations that help millions every year. Ironically, not even Jesus & his disciples would have qualified, because of their commitment to serve others.

To correct this threat to religious liberty and conscience rights, 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 – or thanked if they are already co-sponsoring the bill. For the list of current co-sponsors, please check **H.R. 1179** and **S. 1467** at thomas.loc.gov.

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

- Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at: 202-224-3121, or call your Members' local offices.
- Send your email to congress through www.pacatholic.org.
- 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) and help enact it into law. The Obama administration's decision to require even religious institutions to provide coverage of sterilization and contraceptives, including drugs that can cause an abortion, makes passage of this measure especially urgent. Please ensure that the rights of conscience of all participants in our nation's health care system are respected."

WHEN: Now is the time to build cosponsors. Please act today! Thanks!

To send a message and for more information, go to www.pacatholic.org.