



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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July 7, 2016

Dear Representative:

We are writing as chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, with serious new reasons to urge your immediate action to enact the Conscience Protection Act.

The **Conscience Protection Act of 2016** was introduced to ensure that those providing much-needed health care and health coverage can continue to do so without being forced by government to help destroy innocent unborn children.

As we mentioned in our March letter to you, while existing federal laws already protect conscientious objection to abortion in theory, this protection has not proved effective in practice. Since then, three new developments make the need for immediate action to pass the Conscience Protection Act even more urgent.

First, on June 21 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared, contrary to the plain meaning of current federal law, that California's Department of Managed Health Care can continue forcing all health plans under its jurisdiction to cover elective abortions, including late-term abortions.

California began requiring health plans to cover abortion in 2014. This action prompted religious employers in California that offer group health plans to their employees to lodge an objection with HHS. On June 21, HHS sent the State and the objecting sponsors a letter stating that HHS refuses to take any action because the insurance companies have no moral or religious objection to abortion coverage. For more details on this decision and its erroneous bases, please see our fact sheet at www.usccb.org/conscience.

Second, the state of New York's Department of Financial Services has followed California's lead in forcing health care entities to cover abortions in health plans. The Department is mandating that all health insurers operating in New York, effective January 1, 2016, require small group employers—including faith-based nonprofits and Christian businesses—to cover all kinds of abortions with no exemption whatsoever. Similar to the California abortion mandate, even churches and religious organizations could be required to cover some abortions in violation of their beliefs.

Finally, on June 21, Skagit County Superior Court in Washington ruled that public hospitals in that state must do abortions if they also offer maternity care. Skagit Regional Health was referring women to abortion clinics because none of its physicians and nurse practitioners are willing to do abortions. In its ruling, the court insists that the district must find a way to provide abortions on site. What's more, a 2013 opinion by Washington's Attorney General applies this policy even if the public hospital is acquired by a Catholic healthcare provider.

These disturbing new actions to force healthcare providers to participate in the destruction of human life cry out for an immediate federal remedy. Even those who disagree on the issue of abortion should be able to respect those who wish not to participate in abortion. As we continue to bask in the glow of our Fourth of July celebrations, we strongly urge you to uphold the rights to life and liberty which our Founding Fathers wisely asserted as most fundamental to our nation's existence.

Please enact the Conscience Protection Act now!

Sincerely,



Most Reverend William Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, USCCB Ad Hoc Committee
for Religious Liberty



Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, USCCB Committee on
Pro-Life Activities