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USCCB COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN SAY FEDERAL AGENCY FAILS TO PROTECT CHURCHES FROM CALIFORNIA ELECTIVE ABORTION MANDATE

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**California continues to force health plans to cover elective abortions
USCCB calls for immediate remedy
Ruling fails to respect the right to life, religious freedom, and the rule of law, bishops say**

WASHINGTON—On June 21, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared, contrary to the plain meaning of current federal law, that the California Department of Managed Health Care can continue to force all health plans under its jurisdiction to cover elective abortions. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is calling for an immediate federal legislative remedy.

"It is shocking that HHS has allowed the State of California to force all employers – even churches – to fund and facilitate elective abortions in their health insurance plans. Even those who disagree on the issue of life should be able to respect the conscience rights of those who wish not to be involved in supporting abortion," Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York and Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore said in a statement. Cardinal Dolan is chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities and Archbishop Lori chairs the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty.

"This administrative ruling fails to respect not only the rights to life and religious freedom, but also the will of Congress and the rule of law," the chairmen added. "As a remedy to the Administration's unwillingness to fulfill its responsibilities, we urge Congress to pass the Conscience Protection Act (H.R. 4828, S. 2927) and stop further discrimination against people of faith and against all who respect unborn human life."

Several churches and other religious organizations had filed complaints with the HHS Office for Civil Rights asserting that California's reinterpretation of state law violated the federal Weldon Amendment prohibiting discrimination by states against health insurance plans that do not cover abortion. The Conscience Protection Act would provide specific relief for those who decline to participate in abortion rather than relying solely upon HHS to defend their rights.

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