



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Urgent Memorandum

Date: February 15, 2012

From: Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, Office of the Secretary of Communications

To: Pastors, Diocesan Pro-Life Directors, Diocesan Social Development Directors, Diocesan Communications Directors, State Catholic Conference Directors

**Re: URGENT: USCCB Bulletin Insert on HHS Mandates:
Sweeping HHS Mandate Stands, Violating Conscience Rights and Religious Liberty
Congress Must Act to Fix the Problem**

For many years, the U.S. bishops have supported access to life-affirming health care for all. During the health care reform debate in Congress you received a number of urgent USCCB memoranda calling for health care legislation that would advance the goal of truly universal, life-affirming health care: upholding longstanding federal policies against abortion funding, protecting rights of conscience, and not leaving immigrants worse off.

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 exempted "religious employers," but excluded those that served or employed people who were not members of their religious community. This was so narrow that it failed to cover the vast majority of faith-based organizations, including Catholic hospitals, universities, and service organizations that help millions every year.

After hearing an outcry from many groups, on February 10, the Obama Administration issued a final rule that kept the same broad mandate, and same narrow exception, in place "without change." In addition, the Administration gave some religious non-profits an extra year to comply, and promised to issue more rules that "accommodate" them. But even under this future "accommodation," our charities, hospitals and colleges will still be treated as second-class-citizens of our religious community, and still be forced to pay for coverage that violates their religious convictions. This is unacceptable.

We urgently need legislation to correct the mandate's threats to religious liberty and conscience rights. The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act has been introduced in Congress (H.R. 1179, S. 1467) to ensure that those who participate in the market for health insurance "retain the right to provide, purchase, or enroll in health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions."

To mobilize Catholics to contact Congress, the USCCB is offering the attached urgent bulletin insert. As with our past health care reform efforts, please share this bulletin insert with your parishes and Catholic organizations and agencies as quickly as possible. Even if legislation should change, the action site noted on the Bulletin Insert can change quickly.

More information can be found at www.usccb.org/conscience. Thank you for your urgent actions and prayers on behalf of this nationwide effort!