



Archdiocese of Anchorage

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Office of the Archbishop

February 16, 2012

Dear Pastoral Leaders:

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 a number of urgent USCCB memoranda were put forward, calling for health care legislation that would advance the goal to 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, 2012 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 rule 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.”

Please find attached a bulletin insert prepared by the USCCB. I ask that you make copies for distribution to your parishioners and in particular point out to them the “Action” item toward the document’s end.

Sincerely yours in Christ and Mary,

†Roger L. Schwietz, OMI
Archbishop of Anchorage