

CATHOLIC



ADVOCATE

Parish Action Kit

Protect our Conscience Letter Campaign

A project of Catholic Advocate

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January 31, 2012

Dear Parish Leader,

Thank you for answering the call to rally our fellow Lay Catholics to speak out on the recent Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) rule requiring health care plan providers to violate their conscience and religious beliefs when it comes to certain types of coverage.

Enclosed in this toolkit you will find everything you need to organize support among your parish community for the leading piece of legislation that will remedy this HHS decision made on January 20, 2012.

We have prepared instructions to generate letters to your elected officials, including pre-identifying their information for you. We have enclosed a simple "Question & Answer" document in the hopes of anticipating any issues that might arise.

At Catholic Advocate we engage and encourage faithful Catholics to actively participate in the political process to support elected officials and policies that remain consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

We are inspired by the words of His Holiness Benedict XVI when he addressed the Pontifical Council of the Laity during the "Witnesses to Christ in the political community" gathering on May 21, 2010:

"It is also the duty of the laity to participate actively in political life, in a manner coherent with the teaching of the Church, bringing their well-founded reasoning and great ideals into the democratic debate, and into the search for a broad consensus among everyone who cares about the defense of life and freedom, the protection of truth and the good of the family, solidarity with the needy, and the vital search for the common good."

Our Bishops are speaking out on this issue in almost every single state. Our priests have mentioned it in their homilies. NOW it is our turn to add our voices to theirs! Thank you for joining us on this important journey.

God Bless!



Matt Smith
President
Catholic Advocate

PARISH LETTER CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT OUR CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

Background:

Unfortunately, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) forces health care plans to provide coverage of abortion and use our tax dollars to pay for abortion. In addition, PPACA does not protect the conscience rights of health care insurers, providers, and personnel who decline to provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions.

On February 18, 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services used its regulatory power to remove what was left of conscience rights for health care professionals. On August 1, 2011, they also issued orders requiring health plans to cover contraception, abortifacients, and sterilization. That rule became official on January 20, 2012.

H.R. 1179, the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, was introduced by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (Nebraska-1st District) to correct these intrusions on our rights. The Senate companion legislation introduced by Senator Roy Blunt (Missouri) is S. 1467 by the same name.

The legislation amends PPACA “to permit a health plan to decline coverage of specific items and services that are contrary to the religious beliefs of the sponsor, issuer, or other entity offering the plan or the purchaser or beneficiary (in the case of individual coverage) without penalty.” It also applies similar guidance to the state health insurance exchange programs and becomes retroactive to when PPACA was signed into law by President Obama as if the language was included.

Update on February 10, 2012 White House announcement:

The White House “compromise” or “accommodation” still does not address religious liberty concerns. As our bishops said in response, “we note that today’s proposal continues to involve needless government intrusion in the internal governance of religious institutions, and to threaten government coercion of religious people and groups to violate their most deeply held convictions.” They continued “...we renew our call on Congress to pass, and the Administration to sign, the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.

We are called to a renewed commitment as laity to join our voices together and support the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act to fix the Department of Health and Human Services mandate.

We must speak out and protect our conscience rights!

Plan to check www.protectourconscience.org or www.catholicadvocate.com for updates and more information. Should you have any additional questions, please e-mail us at info@catholicadvocate.com.

Instructions to parish leaders:

1. Print out and make enough copies of the letter to your senators and representative for your parish to send. [attached separately]
2. Identify the best way to distribute to parishioners – for example, whether that is at a table after Mass, or passing them out as people enter Mass. Consider making a poster, requesting an announcement before Mass, inserting information into your parish bulletin, speaking to parish lay groups, or involving your youth group to distribute/collect letters.
3. Make sure to have enough pens and places for people to write to fill them out.
4. Collect the letters and send them back to Catholic Advocate for delivery on Capitol Hill to your representative and senators (note: we will make copies of the letter to the senators so both offices receive the letter.) Our address is: Catholic Advocate 2100 M Street, NW Ste. 170-358 Washington, D.C. 20037

Sample Bulletin Insert / Mass announcement:

On January 20, 2012, the Department of Human Services issued a final rule requiring health plan providers to cover contraception, abortifacients, and sterilization even if it violates their beliefs. This affects an overwhelming amount of Catholic organizations across our country. Please take a moment to fill out the letter available [list where the letters are available] to our senators and representative supporting legislation called the “Respect for Rights of Conscience Act” that will protect our institutions across the country so they can continue to provide health insurance for their employees involved in educating our children, caring for the poor, and providing other important social services without violating their religious beliefs.

Questions and Answers:

Question: My pastor/parish priest is concerned about whether we can do this with our tax status. Are there any conflicts?

Answer: Parishioners organizing and speaking out on a particular legislative issue, not supporting a particular party or candidate, is legal and in compliance with the Internal Revenue Service.

Question: You are highlighting a specific piece of legislation. Where does the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stand on it?

Answer: The USCCB has announced their support for the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act. In addition, Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) said: “Let your elected leaders know that you want religious liberty and rights of conscience restored and that you want the administration’s contraceptive mandate rescinded.”

Question: How will I know you delivered the letters to our representative and two senators?

Answer: We will confirm with you once the letters have been delivered so you can report back to your fellow parishioners. Your elected leaders in Congress will likely respond to each letter within 4 – 6 weeks. Even if they disagree with you, they have an obligation to acknowledge your concerns.