



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

September 2, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

As leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Wisconsin, we strongly oppose the preventive services mandate that all private health plans provide coverage for surgical sterilizations, prescription contraceptives approved by the FDA, and “education and counseling” for “all women of reproductive capacity.” Such a mandate undermines our teaching that human fertility is not a disease. It is a gift, which exercised responsibly, allows humanity to prosper.

Further, in its current form the rules employ a much too narrow definition of religious employer. Its effect is to so constrain religious activity as to diminish the religious liberty of Catholics in Wisconsin and the United States.

Like many Americans, Catholics believe that human beings are social by nature. Each of us has a shared responsibility for the well-being of all. Thus for Catholics, religion is a matter of personal conviction with social consequences. Ministry in the Catholic tradition is not limited to houses of worship. It finds full expression in service to others. The faith we profess and celebrate in the parish is taken into the world through our public ministries.

That is why Catholics in the United States, from the time they arrived, have contributed to the common good by serving the poor and vulnerable – irrespective of their faith – in our many schools, hospitals, and charities. America is the richer for this faith-inspired witness and its many contributions to the general welfare.

Yet, our witness – and the public good that flows from it – is compromised when we are compelled to act in ways inconsistent with our values. This mandate does just that.

As written, the mandate compels our institutions to either act in ways inconsistent with our values or forces them to retreat from serving the most vulnerable. Further, the mandate is also contrary to the very natural law to which our nation’s founders appealed in declaring our nation’s independence. That declaration recognized that our inalienable human rights come from our Creator, not the state. This includes the freedom to worship and to live according to one’s religious convictions.

As Cardinal DiNardo observed in his July 21, 2011, letter to Congress, this mandate nullifies a forty-year bipartisan consensus of respect for rights of religious liberty and conscience in matters of health care. These rights recognized in the Church amendment of 1973, the law governing Federal Employees Health Benefits, and federal legislation for combating AIDS in developing nations, are denied to us in this mandate.

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We recognize that many do not share our beliefs, also grounded in the natural law, regarding contraception, sterilization, and abortion. But our nation's founders did not define the free exercise of religion by the number of believers who claim it. On the contrary, they promised it to all people, whether they are members of a large majority or of a small minority who hold a sincere conviction as to what their faith asks of them. Rather than narrowing the definition of what it means to be a religious organization, the Administration should continue to protect religious liberty as it has in the past.

We recognize as well that our institutions and ministries employ people who are not Catholic. We welcome their service – service that enriches the entire community. They participate in our ministries with full awareness of what the Catholic Church teaches and what our faith asks of us. They know it is our faith that animates our ministries. It is this that draws them to share in the works of the Church.

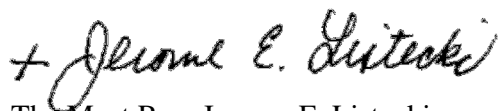
Finally, the mandate's inclusion of drugs like Ella, which can cause chemical abortion, goes well beyond the stated goal of preventing unplanned pregnancies since it fosters the taking of innocent human life. As such, the mandate negates the Administration's assurances that abortion would not become a feature of federal health care reform.

Health care reform should expand, not restrict, the ability of employers and providers to offer the best possible care. It should provide Americans with real health care options that support and do not undermine their most cherished values. The Administration promised us nothing less before. It should deliver nothing less now.

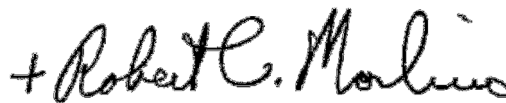
For these reasons, we ask that the regulation be rescinded. If it is not rescinded, we urge that it be modified to expand the religious exemption to reflect a more inclusive understanding of religion and religious institutional arrangements.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this important matter.

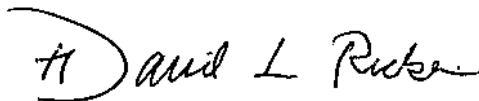
Sincerely,



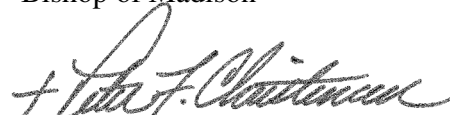
The Most Rev. Jerome E. Listecky
Archbishop of Milwaukee



The Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison



The Most Rev. David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay



The Most Rev. Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior



The Most Rev. William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse

Cc: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services