



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members of the Wisconsin Legislature

FROM: John Hubscher

DATE: June 8, 2009

RE: Conscience Rights of Religious Institutions

As you are no doubt aware, our Catholic faith prohibits the use of artificial contraception. I am writing, therefore, to urge you to remove two provisions from the budget that will impede the religious liberty of Catholic organizations and the people who work in them.

Mandate That Health Insurance Policies Cover Contraceptive Services

Catholic dioceses and other agencies purchase health care insurance for their employees. These policies are structured to respect Catholic moral teaching. As drafted, the budget would compel these Catholic institutions to purchase plans that include contraceptives and perhaps abortifacients. This is in direct opposition to our religious identity and values. We do not believe people of faith should have to choose between their beliefs and their desire to be generous employers.

Requirement That Pharmacies Dispense Contraception

The *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (ERDs)* that guide our institutions state unequivocally that “Catholic health institutions may not promote or condone contraceptive practices but should provide, for married couples and the medical staff who counsel them, instruction both about the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood and in methods of natural family planning.”

Catholic pharmacies, consequently, do not dispense prescriptions for the purpose of birth control. At the same time, our providers recognize that hormonal contraceptives can be prescribed for non-contraceptive reasons to manage other medical conditions. Because we respect patient confidentiality, staff at Catholic pharmacies does not “interrogate” patients as to the reason they seek a prescription. Nor do they refuse to return the prescription to the patient.

Action Requested

The vast majority of health care plans already cover contraceptives. Also there is little, if any, evidence that pharmacies are refusing to dispense contraception. These two provisions, therefore, may provide contraception to few who do not already have it, but they will have the effect of forcing some citizens to act contrary to their religious beliefs.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge that both provisions be removed from AB 75.