



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 202:
HEALTH CARE CONSCIENCE ACT**
Presented to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
By Kim Wadas, Associate Director
June 5, 2013

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, I thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 202.

This legislation accomplishes two simple and straightforward objectives. One is that it provides religious entities that have a moral objection to purchasing coverage for contraceptive services the same protection under Wisconsin law as provided for under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The other is that it affirms that funds held by public authorities are prohibited from being used to subsidize the performance of abortions.

Two sessions ago, the state budget act (2009 Wisconsin Act 28), created Wisconsin Statutes s. 632.895(17), a provision that requires all health insurance policies sold in Wisconsin to provide coverage for prescribed contraceptives and the services necessary to administer those items. Unlike most states with similar requirements, the Wisconsin mandate failed to provide any recognition or protection for religious liberty.

As part of implementation of the ACA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) also mandated that all health plans nationally provide no-cost coverage of contraceptive services, including sterilizations and abortifacients. This mandate, however, exempts certain religious employers from compliance. In addition, non-exempt religious entities that object to the coverage are given “safe harbor” from compliance until August 1, 2013, and may invoke an accommodation to avoid certain compliance measures.

Federal regulation permits states to place a mandate upon employers that is more onerous than applicable under federal law, as Wisconsin has done. Thus, religious groups in Wisconsin that cannot self-insure have no options and are afforded no recognition or exemption. They are forced to purchase morally objectionable coverage. Senate Bill 202 addresses this problem by making state law consistent with federal law.

From the perspective of the Church, both the state and federal mandates are unnecessary and unjust. However, at a minimum, federal law recognizes that people of faith should not be forced to pay for something that violates their moral convictions and religious beliefs. Wisconsin, with its strong constitutional recognition of the right of conscience, should do likewise.

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SB 202 recognizes that central to religious liberty is the right to define ministries. As Catholics, we believe that human beings are social by nature. We further believe that 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 hospitals, our schools, our charitable agencies, and our other public ministries.

We don't do these things to make money or to generate converts. We do them because in Matthew 25 Jesus told us to care for the sick, to help the needy, to educate the ignorant, to welcome the stranger, and to care for the poor wherever we find them. Our institutions reach out to those at the margins because Jesus said that it is at the margins of society that we will find Him. We want the freedom to do this without living a lie. We seek the freedom to serve others without violating our principles.

This legislation also makes certain that our state honors Wisconsin Statutes s. 20.927, which prohibits public subsidization of abortions. This is once again an instance where SB 202 aligns state and federal law, providing clarity on the prohibition of public funding for abortion. Much like the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, SB 202 prohibits the state's Group Insurance Board from providing health insurance that includes coverage for abortion services, with certain exceptions. This legislation makes certain that as a state and as a nation, our public policies champion the dignity of the human person and our public funds are dedicated to the improvement of the human condition.

Both provisions of SB 202 recognize the conscience rights of Wisconsin's citizens. We, therefore, urge you to pass it.