

Bishop Malooly issues letter on “alarming and serious” HHS ruling

January 27, 2012 --- (Wilmington, DE) --- The Most Rev. W. Francis Malooly, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington, has issued the following letter to the people of Delaware and Maryland’s Eastern Shore regarding the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recent rule forcing nearly all private health plans to include coverage for all FDA-approved prescription contraceptive drugs and devices, as well as surgical sterilization. These are listed among "preventive services for women" that all health plans will have to cover without co-pays or other cost-sharing -- regardless of whether the insurer, the employer or other plan sponsor, *or even the woman herself* objects to such coverage.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. On January 20, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those “services” and the health policies they write, and almost all individuals will be forced to buy that coverage as part of their policies. HHS falsely characterizes these as “preventive services” as if pregnancy were a disease.

In so ruling, the administration has cast aside the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States denying to Catholics our nation’s first and foremost fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. As a result, unless the ruling is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled to either violate our consciences or to drop health care coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The administration’s sole concession, after pleas by the United States Catholic Conference, was to give our institutions one year to comply. In the words of Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan: “To force Americans to choose between violating their consciences and foregoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable ... it is as much an attack on access to healthcare as on religious freedom.”

We cannot – we will not – comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second-class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Never before in U.S. history has the federal government forced citizens to directly purchase what violates their beliefs. Once again the Church, God’s People, will need to stand up and demand that their sacred rights and duties be protected.

I am asking you to do two things. First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that true wisdom and justice prevail and religious liberty be restored. Without God we can do nothing but with the Lord nothing is impossible.

Second, I ask you to contact our Congressional Representatives by email or fax, asking them to cosponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act (H.R. 1179, S. 1467). This measure insures that the rights of conscience of all participants in our nation’s healthcare system will be respected. For further information, please consult the website for the United States Catholic Conference (www.usccb.org/conscience) and our diocesan website (www.cdow.org) for more information regarding this tragic situation.

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

Most Rev. W. Francis Malooly, Bishop of Wilmington

Detailed information regarding the HHS ruling and its impact on religious liberty in the United States including a video from Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, president of the USCCB is available at

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/index.cfm>

An easy way to email your Congressional Representatives and ask them to cosponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act (H.R. 1179, S. 1467) <http://www.nchla.org/actiondisplay.asp?ID=292>