



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 23, 2012

## Religious Groups Vow to Fight Obama's Contraception Mandate

The Obama administration announced January 20 that under its 2010 ObamaCare medical legislation employers will be compelled to cover birth control for women free of charge, including controversial contraceptive drugs which can induce abortion early in a woman's pregnancy. The administration rejected an appeal from religious organizations, led by the Catholic Church, for an exemption on insurance provided to employees of religious institutions such as hospitals, colleges, and charities.



Under the ruling, most health insurance covered by employers will be required to include free access to all contraceptives approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), including such "emergency contraception" as Plan B, RU-486, Ella, and other "morning after" drugs which can induce abortion in women who take them very early in their pregnancies.

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The White House made the announcement about the ruling through Kathleen Sebelius (pictured above left), Secretary of Health and Human Services, who insisted that the decision "was made after very careful consideration, including the important concerns some have raised about religious liberty." She expressed her belief that the mandate "strikes the appropriate balance between respecting religious freedom and increasing access to important preventive services."

Cecile Richards, president of the Planned Parenthood, applauded the ruling, saying it "means that millions of women, who would otherwise pay \$15 to \$50 a month, will have access to affordable birth control, helping them save hundreds of dollars each year."

Nancy Keegan of NARAL Pro-Choice America also praised the ruling, asserting that it represented a firm stand "against intensive lobbying efforts from anti-birth-control organizations trying to expand the refusal option even further to allow organizations and corporations to deny their employees contraceptive coverage. As a result, millions will get access to contraception — and they will not have to ask their bosses for permission."

But Christian leaders said the ruling will require that religious employers violate their moral convictions, and they promised to fight the requirement. While the ruling is set to go into effect on August 1 of this year, the Department of Health and Human Services said that it would give religious institutions and other faith-based non-profits until August of 2013 to comply.

"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences," said Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York and president of the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#). "To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable. It is as much an attack on access to health care as



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on religious freedom. Historically this represents a challenge and a compromise of our religious liberty.”

Galen Carey, vice president for government relations with the [National Association of Evangelicals](#), pointed out that “freedom of conscience is a sacred gift from God, not a grant from the state. No government has the right to compel its citizens to violate their conscience. The HHS rules trample on our most cherished freedoms and set a dangerous precedent.” Carey said that his organization would press Congress to address the issue of conscience protections with regard to such measures.

Likewise, Dolan said that with the ruling Obama had “drawn an unprecedented line in the sand” in challenge to those religious institutions which consider birth control irreconcilable with their moral convictions. He added, “The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation.”

Patrick Reilly of the [Cardinal Newman Society](#), a Catholic university watchdog group, said it was ironic “that by worshipping the cult of ‘choice’ the Obama administration has determined that religious organizations lack the freedom to act in fidelity to their beliefs. The White House has sold the First Amendment for a few pennies of political support from the ACLU and the abortion lobby.”

Tom McClusky of the [Family Research Council](#) said that “despite the fact that certain drugs and devices approved by the FDA can work after conception to destroy a newly developed baby, the Obama administration mandate still forces all insurance plans to carry these drugs and devices even if employers are morally opposed.” He noted the apparent political motivation behind Obama’s one-year reprieve which was extended to faith groups, saying that it “does nothing to change the anti-religious, anti-conscience, and anti-life contraceptive mandate,” but merely “postpones its implementation until after the presidential election.”

Hannah Smith of the [Beckett Fund](#), a religious legal advocacy group, called the President’s move a “shameless attempt to kick the can down the road in an election year.” But she warned that, regardless of how many extensions they are given, “religious colleges, universities, and hospitals will never pay for abortion drugs in violation of their religious beliefs — this year or any other year. The right of conscience has no expiration date.”

The [Washington Post](#) noted that in addition to efforts by religious groups to persuade Congress “to overrule the HHS regulations by enshrining conscience protections in law,” there is also a possibility that such groups “could win a court challenge” to the contraception mandate. “The U.S. Supreme Court has showed that it is sympathetic to conscience concerns; earlier this month the justices unanimously upheld the ‘ministerial exception’ that protects religious employers from being subject to many workplace discrimination statutes.”



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