

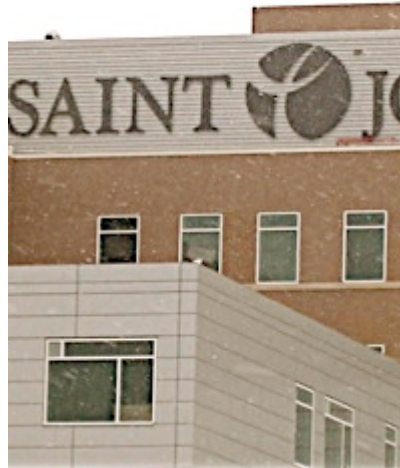


Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 8, 2011

## Catholic Hospitals, Pro-Lifers Object to HHS Birth Control Mandate

Religious groups and pro-life advocates denounced a new ObamaCare mandate requiring health insurance plans to cover birth control and other “preventive care” services for women, with no co-pays. Drafted by the Institute of Medicine and announced last week by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the new requirements will take effect on or after August 1, 2012.

As *The New American* [reported](#) last week, social conservatives, pro-life groups, and religious organizations staunchly oppose the new requirements, because they undermine family values and assail moral and spiritual beliefs among Christian denominations. Particularly of concern are FDA-approved drugs such as Ella and Plan B (the “Morning After Pill”) — misleadingly [referred](#) to as “emergency contraceptives” — which are in fact abortifacients, designed to terminate a developing baby before or after implantation into the mother’s womb.



Catholic hospitals are speaking out against ObamaCare’s new provision, as it will obligate them to cover birth control and voluntary sterilization services free of charge to their employees.

Although the law proposes a conscience exemption, the Catholic Health Association says it is so narrowly written that it would benefit only houses of worship. “I call this the parish housekeeper exemption — that’s about all it covers,” [asserted](#) Sister Carol Keehan, president of an umbrella group for Catholic hospitals. “What we are trying to do is make workable the conscience protection the administration says it is willing to give.”

The problem is the exemption is defined as covering only religious employers who carry a strict religious purpose, which would limit exemptions to only nonprofit churches and religious entities that employ only Christians. This would make Catholic hospitals ineligible for the exemption, as they do not discriminate against whom they hire. Likewise, most Catholic hospitals admit patients from all religious faiths, and even those without a religious faith. Jeanne Monahan, a policy expert at the Family Research Council, explained, “Any religious group that is not focused on proselytizing will not receive this exemption.” She further noted, “Educational institutions, groups that are focused on servicing the homeless, feeding the hungry, they won’t receive it.”

The only option for Catholic hospitals would be to “stop hiring and serving non-Catholics,” [suggested](#) Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Pro-Life



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Activities. But this would prevent Catholic organizations — including hospitals, schools, and social service agencies — from serving anyone not tied to the Catholic faith. “Could the federal government possibly intend to pressure Catholic institutions to cease providing health care, education and charitable service to the general public?” Dinardo questioned, adding, “Health care reform should expand access to basic health care for all, not undermine that goal.”

Many health insurance policies already do cover birth control, but the HHS mandate would require not only insurers to provide free birth control, but also employers, as health plans which offer free birth control will be the only options available. This requirement is what the Catholic hospitals, and other social and religious organizations, object to, saying that to forcibly subsidize such morally contentious services threatens the personal and religious freedoms that define American society. These groups contend that the act of mandating birth control — among countless other provisions in the law — removes the “choice” which candidate Obama so touted during his presidential campaign.

Interestingly, in drafting the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, Thomas Jefferson [wrote](#), “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical.”



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