

Iowa Catholic bishops send letter to congressional delegation on HHS mandate,
Feb. 14, 2012

To Iowa Catholic Conference Legislative Network:

In response to a recent federal Health and Human Services Department mandate, the Catholic bishops of Iowa today sent a letter to members of Iowa's congressional delegation urging co-sponsorship of the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act (H.R. 1179, S. 1467).

The HHS mandate will require almost all religious organizations to pay for sterilization and contraceptive coverage (including drugs which can cause abortions) in their health insurance plans for employees. The exemption provided for religious employers is so narrow it fails to cover the vast majority of faith-based organizations that help millions every year.

The President announced some changes on Feb. 10 in how that mandate will be administered, although the details are unclear. On the evening of Feb. 10, HHS issued a regulation finalizing the rule first issued in August 2011, without making any changes.

The bishops said in their letter, "the mandate will apparently continue to impose an extremely narrow definition of religious institution under which the ministry of Jesus Christ himself would not qualify ... In addition, the mandate continues to threaten government coercion of religious people and groups to violate their most deeply held convictions. At a minimum, any regulation should fully respect religious freedom and freedom of conscience as enshrined in our Constitution and, in particular, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights."

In addition, all four diocesan bishops have sent letters opposing the mandate for distribution in the Catholic parishes of the state. Catholics and others of good will are encouraged to send a message to Congress at www.usccb.org/conscience.

The diocesan bishops of Iowa are Dubuque Archbishop Jerome Hanus, OSB; Bishop R. Walker Nickless of Sioux City; Bishop Martin Amos of Davenport, and Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines.

For an update from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' media blog, go to <http://usccbmedia.blogspot.com/2012/02/six-more-things-everyone-should-know.html>.