



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194

202-541-3070 • FAX 202-541-3054 • EMAIL PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG • WEB WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE

March 8, 2013

Dear Representative:

As Chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, allow me this opportunity to place before you a concern with regard to religious freedom and the right of conscience. These are foundational to our American experiment, and they have allowed people of diverse faiths and belief systems to make their own unique contribution to the common good for two centuries. Resolution of this concern will benefit our working together in our country to serve those most in need.

It is to help preserve the vitally important traditions of religious freedom and the right of conscience that I ask you to support and co-sponsor H.R. 940, the Health Care Conscience Rights Act. On this issue I join with my colleague Archbishop William Lori, Chairman of the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, who has written in detail about the need for such legislation.

Protection for conscience rights in health care is of especially great importance to the Catholic Church, which daily contributes to the welfare of American society through a network of schools, social services, hospitals and assisted living facilities. These institutions, which have been part of the Church's ministry since the earliest days of the Republic, arose from religious conviction. They provide a substantial savings to communities and states throughout the nation, and we believe they contribute to the common good.

The legal protections which allow us to fulfill our obligation to serve others, without compromising our religious or moral convictions, are essential to the continued vitality of these ministries. While those protections have long enjoyed bipartisan consensus, they are under greatly increased pressure today. An example is the mandate for coverage of contraception, sterilization and abortifacient drugs and devices being implemented under the Affordable Care Act's "preventive services" provision. The lawsuits filed against this mandate by dozens of Catholic organizations, and dozens of for-profit and nonprofit organizations led by other people of faith, highlight the need to reassert Americans' right to live and serve in accord with their deepest convictions about the sanctity of human life. Doctors, nurses and other health professionals, as well, have reason today to fear that their ability to serve others in accord with their values will not be well defended in our nation's laws or in our judicial system.

In short, a failure to provide clear and enforceable protection for a right of conscience could undermine Americans' access to quality health care. Providers of health care, as well as those who offer or purchase insurance, should not face an unacceptable choice between preserving their religious and moral integrity or participating in our health care system.

Therefore I urge you to support H.R. 940, and to help incorporate its policy into upcoming "must-pass" legislation.

Sincerely,

Seán Cardinal O'Malley
Archbishop of Boston
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops