



## **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000 • FAX 202-541-3166

September 26, 2013

Dear Representative:

We are writing once again, as Chairmen of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities and Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, on an increasingly grave concern to our Church and many others: **Preserving religious freedom and the right of conscience for all who take part in our health care system.**

We have already urged you to enact the **Health Care Conscience Rights Act** (H.R. 940/S. 1204). As Congress considers a Continuing Resolution and debt ceiling bill in the days to come, we reaffirm **the vital importance of incorporating the policy of this bill into such "must-pass" legislation.**

Protection for conscience rights in health care is of especially great importance to the Catholic Church, which daily contributes to the welfare of U.S. society through schools, social services, hospitals and assisted living facilities. These institutions, which have been part of the Church's ministry since the earliest days of our country, arose from religious convictions. They should not be told by government to abandon or compromise those convictions in order to continue serving their own employees or the neediest Americans. Nor should individual Catholics or others be told they cannot legally purchase or provide health coverage unless they violate their conscience.

A particular threat is the Administration's mandate for covering contraception, sterilization and related education and counseling as "preventive services" for enrollees and their minor daughters. The mandate includes drugs and devices that can act against a human life after fertilization, implicating our moral teaching on abortion as well as contraception. The more than six dozen lawsuits filed against this mandate by hundreds of for-profit and nonprofit organizations led by people of faith highlight the need to reassert Americans' right to live and serve in accord with their deepest convictions about the sanctity of life.

Business owners are subject to the mandate now. Their suits are pending but may not be resolved in the courts for many months. Non-profit religious groups ineligible for the mandate's incredibly narrow exemption for "houses of worship" are only beginning to have their cases heard, yet the mandate will be imposed on them beginning January 1, 2014. As the president of our bishops' conference, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, said on September 17, the Administration's final rule on an "accommodation" for religious groups made "only minor changes" in a policy extensively criticized as inadequate by Catholics and many others. Religious groups serving the needy still receive "second-class treatment," and have no adequate relief unless Congress acts soon.

We make our plea as religious leaders who strongly support universal access to health care. Such access is threatened by Congress's continued failure to protect the right of conscience. Those who help provide health care, and those who need such care for themselves and their families, should not be forced to choose between preserving their religious and moral integrity and participating in our health care system. Please act on this matter without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Seán, O'Malley".

Seán Cardinal O'Malley  
Archbishop of Boston  
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ William E. Lori".

Most Reverend William E. Lori  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops