



*Ad Hoc Committee
for Religious Liberty*



**THE ETHICS &
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
COMMISSION**
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

June 21, 2013

Dear Senator:

As leaders charged with the responsibility of defending religious liberty on behalf of our respective organizations, we join together to urge all members of Congress to support passage of H.R. 940 and S. 1204, the Health Care Conscience Rights Act of 2013. This bill would address threats to religious freedom and rights of conscience that have become particularly grave in the field of health care. As many people are being forced—and many others will soon be forced—to either follow what the government compels or suffer for their faith, now is the time to pass legislation that protects our God-given freedom.

One challenge that demands prompt attention is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' mandate for almost all private health plans to cover sterilization for women and all FDA-approved "contraceptive" drugs and devices, including those which can cause an early abortion, as well as related "education and counseling." Dozens of lawsuits have been filed against this mandate based on moral or religious objections by people of faith, including some from our respective faith communities. Despite assurances to the contrary, HHS's accommodations to protect the rights of religious freedom and conscience under the mandate remain inadequate. Consequently, countless non-profit and for-profit organizations must either obey the government's mandate in violation of their beliefs, or follow their consciences and incur massive fines or the loss of their ministry. This is unacceptable.

Both our denominations value God's gift of procreation. We agree that it is wrong to promote drugs and devices that destroy a newly conceived human life at any stage, as items mandated by this policy can do. We agree that unmarried minors must not be subjected to government-mandated "counseling" on sex and birth control without their parents' knowledge or over their objections, as proposed by this mandate. Further, we agree that the religious beliefs of our faith communities and others must not be suppressed or ignored by a government supposedly committed to protect the religious freedom of all.

Due to deficiencies in existing federal conscience laws, even Americans' right to serve the sick and needy without violating their religious convictions on human life is not secure. Health professionals continue to face pressures and threats to take part in the destruction of innocent life. Yet under current law, women and men in the health professions do not even have a right to go to court to defend their own God-given rights of conscience. Enforcement is left entirely to HHS, which in recent years has become not the solution, but part of the problem.

The Health Care Conscience Rights Act would address these serious problems in ways consistent with our federal government's long history of bipartisan consensus on respect for rights of conscience.

While Catholics and Southern Baptists espouse different theological views, we are united by the belief that Congress must act to help preserve our freedom of religion and conscience. We urge you to do all that you can to ensure prompt enactment of this much-needed legislation.

Handwritten signature of William E. Lori in blue ink.

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

Handwritten signature of Russell D. Moore in black ink.

Dr. Russell D. Moore
President
The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of
The Southern Baptist Convention