

Standing Together for Religious Freedom

An Open Letter to All Americans



We write as an informal and diverse group of religious leaders, theologians, lay practitioners and community servants. We believe the doctrines of our respective faiths require something of us beyond the walls of our churches, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship. Those faith convictions manifest themselves through our daily interactions among family, neighbors, strangers and institutions.

Further, we recognize the United States, at its best, is unique among the nations of the world when it defends the self-evident freedom of all people to exercise their faith according to the dictates of their consciences. This freedom contributes to the vibrancy of our nation. Unfortunately, this delicate liberty of conscience is under threat.

Through its contraceptive coverage mandate, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) continues to breach universal principles affirmed and protected by the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws. While the mandate is a specific offense, it represents a greater fundamental breach of conscience by the federal government. Very simply, HHS is forcing Citizen A, against his or her moral convictions, to purchase a product for Citizen B. The HHS policy is coercive and puts the administration in the position of defining—or casting aside—religious doctrine. This should trouble every American.

Many of the signatories on this letter do not hold doctrinal objections to the use of contraception. Yet we stand united in protest to this mandate, recognizing the encroachment on the conscience of our fellow citizens. Whether or not we agree with the particular conscientious objection is beside the point. HHS continues to deny many Americans the freedom to manifest their beliefs through practice and observance in their daily lives.

The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Free exercise includes the freedom to order one’s life, liberties and pursuits in accordance with his or her convictions. HHS breaches the free exercise clause and federal statutes (passed with broad bipartisan support) by selectively denying some Americans this constitutionally protected right.

Americans afford each other broad liberties with respect to lifestyle choices. However, the federal government has neither a compelling interest nor the appropriate authority to coerce one citizen to fund or facilitate specific lifestyle choices of another. If the federal government can force morally opposed individuals to purchase contraception or abortion-causing drugs and devices for a third party, what prevents this or future administrations from forcing other Americans to betray their deeply held convictions?

Therefore, we call upon HHS to, at a minimum, expand conscience protections under the mandate to cover any organization or individual that has religious or moral objections to covering, providing or enabling access to the mandated drugs and services. Further, because HHS claims to be acting on authority granted it by Congress, we ask Congress to consider how it might prevent such offenses from occurring in the future. Any policy that falls short of affirming full religious freedom protection for all Americans is unacceptable.

Signed:

(Signatories on next page)

Permaneciendo Unidos por la Libertad Religiosa

Una carta abierta al pueblo estadounidense



Escribimos la presente como un grupo informal y diverso de líderes religiosos, teólogos, practicantes laicos y servidores comunitarios. Creemos que las doctrinas de nuestra fe necesitan ir más allá de las paredes de nuestras iglesias, sinagogas, templos y otros lugares de alabanza. Esas convicciones religiosas se manifiestan a través de nuestro interactuar diario entre familia, vecinos, desconocidos e instituciones.

Además, reconocemos que los Estados Unidos se distingue entre las naciones del mundo por defender las libertades de la gente de practicar su fe según lo dictan sus conciencias. Esta libertad contribuye a la vitalidad de nuestra nación. Desafortunadamente, esta delicada libertad de conciencia está en peligro.

A través del mandato de cobertura de anticonceptivos, el Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos de los Estados Unidos (HHS) continúa quebrantando principios universales afirmados y protegidos por la Constitución de los Estados Unidos y otras leyes federales. Mientras el mandato es una ofensa específica, este representa una violación más profunda por parte del gobierno federal a los derechos de la conciencia. De manera simple, el HHS está forzando a Ciudadano A a que contra sus creencias morales, compre un producto para Ciudadano B. La directiva del HHS es coactiva y coloca a la administración en la posición de definir o dejar a un lado la doctrina religiosa. Esto debería preocupar a todos los estadounidenses.

Muchos de los que firman esta carta no tienen objeciones doctrinales al uso de anticonceptivos. Sin embargo, estamos unidos en protesta a este mandato, reconociendo la violación a los derechos de conciencia de nuestros hermanos ciudadanos. Si estamos de acuerdo o no con la objeción de conciencia en particular, no es el punto. El HHS continúa negándoles a muchos estadounidenses la libertad de manifestar sus creencias a través de la práctica y el cumplimiento en sus vidas diarias.

La Primera Enmienda de la Carta de Derechos de los Estados Unidos sostiene que “El Congreso no aprobará ley alguna por la que adopte una religión oficial del Estado o prohíba el libre ejercicio de la misma”. El libre ejercicio incluye la libertad de vivir la vida, las libertades y búsquedas de acuerdo a las creencias del individuo. El HHS viola la cláusula de libre ejercicio y los estatutos federales (aprobados con amplio apoyo bipartidista) al negar selectivamente a algunos ciudadanos este derecho protegido por la Constitución.

Los estadounidenses disfrutan amplias libertades al elegir sus estilos de vida. Sin embargo, el gobierno federal no tiene un interés apremiante ni la autoridad apropiada para forzar a un ciudadano a financiar o facilitar los estilos de vida específicos de otro individuo. Si el gobierno federal puede forzar moralmente a individuos que se oponen moralmente a pagar por anticonceptivos, o medicamentos que causan abortos para una tercera persona, que previene a administraciones futuras de obligar a otros estadounidenses a que traicionen sus creencias?

Por eso, hacemos un llamado al HHS, a que por lo menos amplíe las protecciones de conciencia bajo el mandato para cubrir a cualquier organización o individuo que posea objeciones morales o religiosas de financiar, proveer o facilitar acceso a los medicamentos y servicios mandados. Además, porque el HHS dice actuar con la autoridad extendida por el Congreso, solicitamos al Congreso a que considere como prevenir que estas ofensas ocurran en el futuro. Cualquier directiva que no afirme las protecciones completas de la libertad de religión para todos los estadounidenses, será inaceptable.

Firmas de los participantes en la siguiente página.

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