



FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE

ACTION ALERT

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Protect Rights of Conscience and Religious Liberty

Now is the time to urge Congress to work to enact critically important conscience protections this year. Such protections will likely be included in a soon-to-be-introduced appropriations bill, but House members should be urged to ensure that it remains a high priority and goes into law. Senators should also be called upon to help ensure passage of these needed protections. Please take action today to contact Congress.

The need for legislation protecting the rights of conscience and religious liberty has grown more pressing. The Obama Administration's contraceptive/abortifacient mandate under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) began to be enforced against religious nonprofit schools, charities and health care providers on January 1, 2014. More recently the state of California started forcing all health insurers in the state to include elective abortions in the health plans they sell. These two problems are addressed by the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (H.R. 940). It would add a long-overdue conscience clause to the ACA, and strengthen the Weldon amendment that forbids governmental bodies which receive federal Health and Human Services funds from discriminating against those who decline to take part in abortion or abortion coverage.

Recommended Actions to take immediately:

- Send emails through NCHLA's Action Center at: nchla.org/actiondisplay.asp?ID=292
- Contact your Representative and Senators by phone. Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, or call their local offices. Members' mailing addresses may be found at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
- Follow us on Twitter @nchla and retweet our posts. Repost this alert to Facebook or other social media platforms.

Suggested Messages:

By phone, letter, or email:

Message to the House:

"Please help ensure that the policy of the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (H.R. 940) is enacted this year as part of "must-pass" legislation such as annual appropriations bills. Government must not force Americans to violate their religious and moral beliefs about respect for life when they provide health services or provide or purchase health coverage."

Message to the Senate:

"Please help ensure that the policy of the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (H.R. 940) is enacted into law this year. Government must not force Americans to violate their religious and moral beliefs about respect for life when they provide health services or provide or purchase health coverage."

Background

The contraceptive/abortifacient mandate: Under the ACA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires most health plans to cover "preventive services for women," including drugs and procedures that many citizens find objectionable for moral and religious reasons. These objectionable

items include sterilization, FDA-approved birth control (such as the IUD, Depo-Provera, “morning-after” pills, and the abortion-inducing drug Ella), and “education and counseling” to promote these to all “women of reproductive capacity,” including minor girls. Religious organizations offering education, health care and charitable services do not qualify under a very narrow exemption for a “religious employer.”

Abortion coverage mandate: On August 22, 2014, the California Department of Managed Health Care ordered all health plans under its jurisdiction, including those provided by churches and other religious institutions to their employees, to provide coverage for all abortions. Similar proposals have emerged in other states. In theory, current federal law forbids such discrimination, but the law has deficiencies that could allow California to evade the law or challenge it in court—and it does not allow the victims of discrimination to go to court to defend their own rights.

On February 13, 2015 Cardinal O’Malley and Archbishop Lori of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urged House members to support and co-sponsor H.R. 940. For this letter and other information, see: www.usccb.org/conscience

Update 6/8/15