

Subject: MEDIA RELEASE: Texas Bishops Urge Texas Delegation to Oppose HHS Mandate
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Texas Bishops Urge Texas Delegation to Oppose HHS Mandate

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AUSTIN - Texas' Roman Catholic Bishops today urged the state's Congressional delegation to strongly oppose new governmental mandates requiring religious employers to provide contraceptive, abortifacient, and sterilization services as part of their health care plans.

In a letter sent to all members of Congress from Texas, the bishops called "unconscionable and unnecessary" the new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requirement that is being attached as part of the Affordable Care Act of 2011. The mandate has provoked a groundswell of controversy since its announcement two weeks ago.

"For religiously based social service agencies, health care providers, and educational institutions, this mandate abrogates our country's foremost right to religious freedom," wrote Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, and Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, on behalf of the Texas bishops.

The HHS mandate ". . . forces religious employers into bitter choices: to violate their religious convictions and consciences, to stop providing health coverage for their employees, or to end the charitable, medical, and educational services that for centuries have provided a crucial safety net to the poor and vulnerable of our society," the Cardinal and Archbishop wrote.

The letter urges members of the Texas congressional delegation to co-sponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act--co-sponsored by U.S. Reps. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Dan Boren (D-OK) in the U.S. House and U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO) in the U.S. Senate--that preserves freedom of conscience for those who provide or purchase health care coverage.

"These bills will prevent any mandates under the Affordable Care Act from effectively disregarding the freedom of conscience and brings law into line with the federal government's long tradition of respect for those rights," said the bishops. "Institutions that sponsor, purchase, or issue health plans should not be forced to contravene their religious principles just to provide insurance to their employees; nor should families be forced to violate their religious convictions to care for their children."

The bishops have also asked Catholics across the state to contact their members of Congress to voice their concerns. The Texas Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Texas Bishops, has created a web site, www.TXcatholic.org/HHSMandate.asp, to assist in contacting members of Congress and the Obama Administration regarding protecting religious freedoms and supporting the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act. The Conference web site also includes links to the Bishops' letters, blog posts, and news coverage on the issue.

The Texas Catholic Conference is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas and is the official public policy voice of the Bishops of Texas. For more information on the Texas Catholic Conference, visit www.TXCatholic.org.