

Health and Human Services Mandate

On February 15, 2012 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a new mandate now known as the “contraceptive rule” that requires insurance providers to cover sterilization, abortion, and contraceptives. This mandate exempts churches and religious organizations, but not church-affiliated nonprofit corporations (such as hospitals and universities).

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has vocally and publicly stood against the rule, arguing that it infringes upon their religious freedom. Catholic doctrine has long been strictly opposed to all forms of contraception. By mandating that all insurance plans cover birth control, including abortion, the new mandate puts the Church and its affiliate organizations in the position of spending money on a policy that covers actions directly contradictory to the Church’s teachings.

Proponents of the new rule accuse the USCCB of attempting to deny rights to employees (who may themselves not be Catholic) of Catholic institutions such as Georgetown University or some of the largest hospitals in the U.S. Some point out that no patient is *required* to buy or use contraceptives, so individuals are free to practice their own faiths, but that it is not fair for large employer to be exempt from a federal health care regulation simply because the large employer is affiliated with the Catholic Church.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Can an employer ethically limit the health care options of its employees based on its institutional morality?
2. Can the government force a religious institution to spend money on actions it finds immoral?