



FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE

ACTION ALERT

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Protect Conscience Rights in Health Care: Retain Conscience Regulation

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is inviting public comment on a proposal to *rescind* an important December 2008 federal regulation. The 2008 regulation implements and enforces three federal laws protecting the conscience rights of health care providers, especially those at risk of being discriminated against because of their moral or religious objection to abortion. For background, see:

www.usccb.org/conscienceprotection. The rescission proposal was published in the *Federal Register* on March 10. See: nchla.org/docdisplay.asp?ID=233. *The public has until April 9 to submit comments.*

As they did when the conscience regulation was first proposed, pro-abortion groups are again trying to flood HHS with comments attacking conscience rights. Their chief message: Rescind the regulation because conscience clauses (which they call “refusal” or “denial” clauses) interfere with women’s “access” to health care. These groups want to force doctors, nurses and hospitals to violate their consciences or leave the profession. The Catholic community and others must speak out so this will not happen. Talking points:

- Religious liberty and freedom of conscience have been building blocks of our society since its founding. We respect conscientious objection for those opposed to war, physicians opposed to taking part in capital punishment, and others who object to involvement in the taking of life. We can do no less in the context of abortion.
- Conscience protection does not threaten access to health care. Allowing health care providers to serve the public without violating their consciences *protects and enhances* access to health care, by ensuring continued participation by some of our most dedicated health professionals. Catholic and other faith-based providers are specially called to serve the poorest and most vulnerable, from the inner city to remote rural areas – if they are driven away, who will replace them?
- Abortion, in particular, cannot be seen as “standard” health care. Most physicians, nurses and hospitals choose *not* to provide abortion, and the Hippocratic Oath that established medicine as a profession has rejected abortion for many centuries. Forcing health professionals to be involved in abortion against their will shows a distorted sense of priorities—one that will irreparably damage the healing professions and undermine efforts to work together for health care reform.

All persons are encouraged to submit comments. Health care professionals—hospital administrators, physicians, pharmacists, nurses, technicians, and the like—should submit examples or personal experiences where discrimination was or is a concern. *Please write now urging the Administration to retain the regulation protecting conscience rights!* For excellent comments by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office of General Counsel, see: www.usccb.org/conscienceprotection/hhs_comments_conscience_09final.pdf.

ACTION: An e-mail message can be sent through the NCHLA Action Center at www.nchla.org. Comments can also be submitted electronically by e-mail to proposedrescission@hhs.gov or online through www.Regulations.gov (check “Select to find documents” and then enter “Rescission Proposal”). In addition, comments can be mailed to: Office of Public Health and Science, DHHS, Attn: Rescission Proposal Comments, Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg., 200 Independence Ave., SW, Rm 716G, Washington, DC 20201. In all comments, refer to “Rescission Proposal.”

MESSAGE: “Please retain the conscience regulation, and enforce the laws protecting the right of health care providers to serve patients without violating their moral and religious convictions. The government has a special responsibility to ensure that the conscience rights of health care providers are fully protected.”

WHEN: Please submit your comments by close of business April 9, 2009. Thanks! 3/16/09; updated 3/25/09