

What the Bishops Won't Tell You

An Open Letter to Kathleen Sebelius from Catholic Politicians

September 28, 2011

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

Thank you for your recent decision to add full coverage of women's preventive health services, including contraceptive services, education and counseling, as a part of the benefits required under the Affordable Care Act. Making it easier to afford family planning, and other preventive health services, will make a difference for many of the families in our districts.

We, the undersigned, are all **Catholic policymakers**. We **know far too well how important access to affordable healthcare services can be**. Every day we hear the stories of our constituents working for their families, struggling to make ends meet in these difficult economic times, while trying to afford the basic healthcare services they and their families need.

We are dismayed to learn, however, that the relief this increased coverage will bring may not come to all those we represent. **Our belief in social justice compels us to stand up for the rights and needs of every person, especially those who face economic hardships.** As written, these regulations include a refusal clause that would allow some employers to refuse to cover contraception services in insurance offered to their employees. **The women who work for religious institutions, as well as the spouses and dependents who are covered by an employee's policy, deserve to be included—not excluded—in this important step forward toward affordable healthcare for all.** Whether they work as administrators or school teachers, secretaries or maintenance staff, cooks or gardeners, their healthcare options should not be limited by their employers' beliefs. Social justice is not served by excluding some from opportunities available to others.

Like you, Madame Secretary, as Catholics we each have a responsibility to listen to our own consciences in matters of moral decision making and to respect other people's right to do the same. This deference for the primacy of conscience extends to all women, regardless of their employers, and to their personal decisions about which family planning methods are best for them and for their families. Giving every family the access to make the best family planning decision for their lives, for their health and based on their conscience respects every woman. **Including a refusal clause for coverage of contraceptive options does not serve the needs of the American women and families we represent.**

Those advocating for refusal clauses in order to protect conscience rights are not concerned with the women who will be left behind should such clauses be enacted, nor the protection of their consciences. No, **those who wish to block access to reproductive healthcare services, including contraception, seek to impose their decisions and beliefs upon others regardless of any one individual's need or faith or health.** Should their wishes be enacted, the policy would, in simple terms, unfairly discriminate against women if they or their families work for religious employers.

We are the citizens who look to you to further the health of everyone, no matter their background, beliefs or benefit plan. **We are your fellow Catholics who ask you to respect the conscience of every individual and their right to meaningful, affordable, comprehensive healthcare choices including the full range of family planning services.** We are the policymakers who strive to represent our constituents—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—and to speak for those who elected us to represent them.

Full coverage of women's preventive health services by every employer respects conscience rights and furthers social justice and the common good— a refusal provision that will mandate extra payments for some women and their families does not. **We call on you to respect the conscience of every woman,** regardless of where she works; to **remove this onerous refusal clause** from the rule governing contraceptive coverage as a preventive service; and to **ensure that access to family planning is provided to all women.** We believe it is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

Representative Rafael Anchia (D)
103 – Texas

Representative Tim Briggs (D)
149 – Pennsylvania

Senator Angie Buhl (D)
15 – South Dakota

Senator Capri Cafaro (D)
32 – Ohio

Senator Olivia Cajero Bedford (D)
27 – Arizona

Representative John R. Cloutier (D)
Sullivan 4 – New Hampshire

Representative Tricia Ann Cothan (D)
100 – North Carolina

Senator Lou D'Allesandro (D)
20 – New Hampshire

Senator D. Scott Dibble (DFL)
60 – Minnesota

Representative Johannah L. Donovan (D)
Chittenden-3-5 – Vermont

Mayor John Duran (D)
West Hollywood – California

Representative Jessica Farrar (D)
148 – Texas

Representative Raymond Gagnon (D)
Sullivan 4 – New Hampshire

Representative Ruben Gallego (D)
16 – Arizona

Councilmember Julia R. Gusse (D)
Maricopa – Arizona

Representative Robert Hagan (D)
60 – Ohio

Representative Elizabeth "Lisa" Hernandez (D)
24 – Illinois

Representative Katie Hobbs (D)
15 – Arizona

Delegate Patrick Hope (D)
47 – Virginia

Senator Sara Branon Kittell (D)
Franklin – Vermont

Representative Kathleen C. Keenan (D)
Franklin-3 – Vermont

Representative Joan G. Lenos (D)
Chittenden-5-2 – Vermont

Representative John Lesch (DFL)
66A – Minnesota

Representative Mary Lou Marzian (D)
34 – Kentucky

Representative Joe Mullery (DFL)
58A – Minnesota

Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino (D)
12 – New Mexico

Representative Annette Quijano (D)
20 – New Jersey

Senator Juan M. Pichardo (D)
2 – Rhode Island

Representative Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda (D)
9 – Florida

Representative Steve Shurtleff (D)
Merrimack 10 – New Hampshire

Representative Christine Sinicki (D)
20 – Wisconsin

Representative Mimi Stewart (D)
21 – New Mexico

Representative Robert Théberge (D)
Coos 4 – New Hampshire

Senator Leticia Van de Putte (D)
26 – Texas

Senator Juan Vargas (D)
40 – California

Representative Armando Walle (D)
140 – Texas