

What the Bishops Won't Tell You

An Open Letter to Kathleen Sebelius from Catholic Groups

September 23, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

As progressive Catholic organizations, our social justice tradition compels us to speak out and advocate for the least among us. For that reason, **we write urging you to not impose burdensome conscience clauses seeking to limit and, indeed, eliminate access, and dishonor the conscience of those seeking family planning services.**

Including comprehensive family planning services as a preventive benefit for women's health under the Affordable Care Act will make these services more affordable—and therefore more accessible—for all women, but especially for poor women. Access to family planning **has improved social and economic opportunities for women, prevented unintended pregnancies and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases**, including HIV/AIDS, and decreased infant, child and maternal deaths—all while **saving billions in taxpayer dollars.**

As Catholics, we are called by our faith to show solidarity with and compassion for the poor. Our tradition's preferential option for the poor compels us to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the least among us. By eliminating copayments for family planning and making these services more affordable, **poor women in the United States will have greater access to these services.** The vast majority of Catholics in the United States support these services—**98 percent of sexually active Catholic women in the US have used a modern contraceptive method at some point in their lives.** When Catholic voters considered healthcare reform in 2009, **more than six in ten supported health insurance coverage**—whether it is private or government insurance—for contraception and family planning. It is clear that family planning is strongly supported by Catholics throughout the United States.

Allowing some entities to opt out of this no-cost coverage for family planning would create an unnecessary burden upon many employees across the country. We find these conscience clause provisions extremely disheartening, as **they would undermine the consciences of women who seek family planning health services.** As Catholics, we are called to listen to our individual consciences in matters of moral decision making, and to respect other people's right to do the same. We cannot and do not presume to tell others how best to listen to their own consciences as they make important decisions about whether or when to have children. **We do not support any effort to deny and disrespect the conscience of individuals who seek comprehensive family planning services, and encourage you to reject all policies that do so.**

A large majority of Catholics in the US are committed to ensuring that all women and men have access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services. We are hopeful that you will not impose undue burdens upon access in the form of conscience clause restrictions, and that you will ensure that all Catholics will be able to listen to their consciences and have their consciences honored in turn.

Sincerely,

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Catholics for Choice
Chicago Women-Church
Congregation for Peace with Justice Committee
of the Sisters of Providence SMW
CORPUS

DignityUSA
Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Faithful of Southern Illinois (FOSIL)
Greater Cincinnati Women-Church
National Coalition of American Nuns
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Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's
Ordination Conference
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Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
Women's Ordination Conference

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