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Take action! Support the 'Respect for Rights of Conscience Act'

On January 20, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reaffirmed a rule that virtually all private health care plans must cover sterilization, abortifacients, and contraception. The rule is set to take effect August 1, 2012. Non-profit religious employers that do not now provide such coverage, and are not exempt under the rule's extremely narrow definition of religious employer, will be given one year — until August 1, 2013 — to comply.

Responding to the announcement, Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated: "In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences." Cardinal-designate Dolan continued: "To force Americans to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable. . . It is as much an attack on access to health care as on religious freedom." Noting that the Obama administration "has now drawn an unprecedented line in the sand," the Cardinal-designate urged that the HHS mandate be overturned. "The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation."

To correct the threats to religious liberty and rights of conscience posed by PPACA, the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act has been introduced in Congress (H.R. 1179, S. 1467). This measure will ensure that those who participate in the health care system "retain the right to provide, purchase, or enroll in health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions." It is more important than ever that Members of Congress be urged to co-sponsor this measure.

Please contact your U.S. Representative and urge his or her co-sponsorship for H.R. 1179. To contact your U.S. Representative simply via e-mail, visit www.micatholicconference.org.