



STAND UP FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

On May 21, Catholic institutions, including the Archdiocese of Washington, filed a legal action in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to challenge the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) unprecedented mandate dramatically redefining religious ministry and requiring religious organizations to provide coverage for drugs and procedures in direct conflict with their religious beliefs. Archbishop Carroll High School, Inc.; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, Inc.; the Consortium of Catholic Academies of the Archdiocese of Washington, Inc.; and The Catholic University of America are also plaintiffs in the same action. This local lawsuit is one of 12 actions filed nationwide on May 21 on behalf of 43 separate Catholic institutions.

Here's why:

The lawsuits are about the First Amendment, religious freedom and our ability to serve the public. The lawsuits challenge HHS's new definition of what is, and is not, a religious institution. The HHS mandate, which changes decades of practice and precedent, now defines religious ministry so narrowly that religious schools, hospitals, and social service ministries don't qualify as religious, and must therefore provide abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives, and sterilization, that violate their beliefs, or incur crippling fines.

The government's new definition of religious institutions denies that organizations that exist as a reflection of a commitment to practice our faith – schools, hospitals, social service organizations, and charitable endeavors – are "religious enough." It says that an organization is not religious if it does not primarily serve and hire people of its own faith. Under this change in definition, the work of Mother Teresa does not qualify as the work of a religious organization. Catholic organizations and dioceses do not keep running tallies of the number of Catholics and non-Catholics they serve—they never even ask. The only way a diocese can know for sure if it is exempt is by undergoing an intrusive governmental examination into the religious beliefs of our employees and the people we serve.

Many politicians, and some in the media, want people to think this controversy is about access to contraception. It is not. The government claims it only wants to ensure access to abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives, and sterilization, but these services are already widely available (even to teenage girls) at little or no cost. In fact, with a prescription, birth control pills cost just nine dollars a month, or can be obtained at no cost to the individual at certain health care clinics. No part of the lawsuit challenges women's established legal right to purchase contraception. It challenges the government's ability to force the Church to provide drugs and procedures that violate our religious beliefs.

To learn more, visit PreserveReligiousFreedom.org