

## CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF JACKSON

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February 15, 2012

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Catholic bishops have long supported access to life-affirming healthcare for all, and the conscience rights of everyone involved in the complex process of providing that healthcare. However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued regulations that will profoundly affect the Catholic Church and other faith-based organizations in our country. HHS has confirmed that virtually all private health insurance plans will be required to include coverage for sterilizations and contraceptives, including drugs that cause abortions and that these services be provided without co-pays or cost sharing.

This is not an issue of contraception. Even those who do not agree with the Church's moral teachings are finding it outrageous that the U.S. government would attempt to force the Church to pay for procedures and drugs that would violate our belief in the sacredness of human life. The ruling set forth by HHS officials undermines the religious liberty of all Americans and sets an extremely scary precedent. This decision further cuts away at the fabric of our nation by threatening our constitutional right as individuals and as a church to religious liberty.

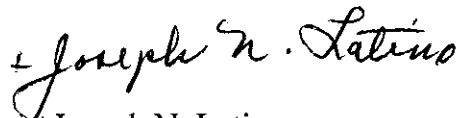
Many Catholics are shocked and angry. Indeed all Americans should be shocked and angry that the federal government would so readily trample on the fundamental right to Religious Freedom guaranteed to us in the U.S. Constitution. This right was so central to our Founding Fathers that they made it the First Freedom in the Bill of Rights.

The regulation does not exempt Catholic charities, schools, universities, or hospitals. These institutions are vital to the mission of the Church, but HHS does not deem them "religious employers" worthy of conscience protection, because they do not "serve primarily persons who share their religious tenets." HHS denies these organizations religious freedom precisely because their purpose is to serve the common good of society—a purpose that government should encourage, not punish. Even if the promise of "accommodation" is fulfilled entirely, religious charities, schools, and hospitals will still be forced to violate their beliefs.

On behalf of the faithful of the Diocese of Jackson, part of the universal Catholic Church, we again ask HHS to withdraw this mandate because it is an unprecedented federal interference in the religious liberty and freedom of conscience of the Catholic community and the Diocese. It is an affront to all citizens and all people of faith who for over 200 years have been guaranteed the right to practice that faith in the public arena.

It must be rescinded - NOW. On this issue we must not be silent or relent.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Joseph N. Latino". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

+Joseph N. Latino  
Bishop of Jackson

Please visit our diocesan web site [www.jacksondiocese.org](http://www.jacksondiocese.org) for more information on this vital issue.