



*Statement on new federal rules requiring religious  
& other employers to provide contraceptive coverage  
in their health insurance plans.*

*Most Reverend José H. Gomez  
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

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President Barack Obama's announcement on Friday concerning health care mandates is troubling and frustrating because unfortunately, he did not really respond to the deep moral concerns raised by America's Catholic community.

The government is still ordering almost every U.S. employer to provide health insurance that covers birth control, sterilization and abortion-causing drugs free of charge.

As I have said before, this does not make sense as a public health policy priority. Worse, it will force millions of Americans to have to violate their consciences or risk the penalties of breaking the law — penalties that include possibly millions of dollars in fines.

The President now says that Church hospitals, schools and charities will not have to pay directly for their employees' contraceptive coverage; instead our insurance companies will. This is frustrating because it completely misses the point. The issue here is not one of bookkeeping or accounting; it is a matter of moral principle and religious liberty.

The government has no right to require the Catholic Church or other institutions to pay for — even indirectly — products and services that we find to be immoral and unconscionable. Again, this is not a question of contraception; it is a question of religious liberty. This mandate continues to represent a grave government intrusion on Catholic consciences and on the freedom of our Catholic institutions.

There are many other serious moral problems and unanswered questions in the President's proposed "accommodation." So, I join my brother bishops in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in calling on the government to withdraw this mandate which I believe to be both unnecessary and unconstitutional. I also join my brother bishops in urging the U.S. Congress to pursue its own measures to repeal this mandate and to pass the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.

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