

NCBC Expresses Disappointment Regarding Revision of Federal Conscience Protections

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February 22, 2011. The National Catholic Bioethics Center, while applauding the federal government's stated commitment to reinforce compliance with federal conscience protection laws, is gravely disappointed by the restriction of the scope of such protection from the original language, now limiting the protections only to abortion and sterilization procedures.

The intent of the Provider Conscience Rule was to reinforce and reaffirm existing federal laws, which prohibit recipients of certain federal funds from coercing individuals in the health care field into participating in actions they find religiously or morally objectionable. Such protection from discrimination ensures a vibrant pluralism in the delivery of health care. Not protecting consciences implicitly endorses a monolithic view of health care delivery in a setting where there is legitimate moral disagreement. By ensuring that consciences are protected, the federal government will help to assure that the people of the United States continue to receive care from a reasonable, thinking, caring and conscience-driven health care force.

Increasingly health care professionals are being coerced to violate conscience in myriad ways, such as in the dispensing or administering the so called "morning after pill," as well as the mandate that pharmacists fill all legal prescriptions in a state where assisted suicide is legal. Furthermore, there is no protection of conscience for refusing to participate in mutilating surgeries, such as transgender surgeries, or for assisting unmarried persons with fertility treatments. Lastly, there is no clarification of the rights of conscience for emergency rooms, as it pertains to abortion, about which the federal law requires conscience protection.

The founders of this great country envisioned a democracy that allows not only for the free exercise of religion, but one that creates an environment free of coercion from the violation of deeply held moral convictions. The absence of the protection from discrimination because of such deeply held beliefs creates an authoritarian environment not dissimilar to oppressive governmental regimes abroad which foster catastrophic violations of human life.
