

July 26, 2011

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

As progressive Catholic organizations, our social justice tradition compels us to speak out and advocate for the least among us. For that reason, we write to you today to encourage you to implement the coverage recommendations of the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report which include comprehensive contraceptive methods including counseling as a preventive benefit. We also implore you not to impose burdensome conscience clauses which seek to limit and indeed eliminate access, and dishonor the conscience of those seeking services.

Including comprehensive family planning services as a preventive benefit for women's health under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will make these services more affordable and therefore more accessible for all women, but especially for poor women. Access to family planning has improved social and economic opportunities for women, prevented unintended pregnancies and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and decreased infant, child and maternal deaths, all while saving billions in taxpayer dollars.

As Catholics, we are called by our faith to show solidarity with and compassion for the poor. Our tradition's preferential option for the poor compels us to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the least among us. By eliminating co-payments for family planning and making these services more affordable, poor women in the United States will have greater access to these services. The vast majority of Catholics in the United States support these services—98 percent of sexually active Catholic women in the US have used a modern contraceptive method at some point in their lives. When Catholic voters considered healthcare reform in 2009, more than six in ten supported health insurance coverage—whether it is private or government insurance—for contraception and family planning. It is clear that the IOM's recommendations are strongly supported by Catholics throughout the United States.

We have heard calls for some entities to be allowed to opt-out of this no-cost coverage for family planning by creating burdensome conscience clause provisions. We find these calls extremely disheartening, as they would undermine the consciences of women who seek family planning health services. As Catholics, we are called to listen to our individual consciences in matters of moral decision-making, and to respect other people's right to do the same. We cannot and do not presume to tell others how best to listen to their own consciences as they make important decisions about whether or when to have children. We do not support any effort to deny and disrespect the conscience of individuals who seek comprehensive family planning services, and encourage you to reject all efforts that do so.

A large majority of Catholics in the US are committed to ensuring that women and men have access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services. The recommendations from the IOM are an important step in ensuring that all women will have access to family planning services under the ACA and that all Catholics will be able to listen to their consciences and have their consciences honored in turn.

Sincerely,

8th Day Center for Justice - Women in Church and Society Committee  
Association for Rights in the Catholic Church  
Call to Action  
Catholics for Choice  
Chicago Women-Church

Congregation for Peace with Justice Committee of the Sisters of Providence SMW

CORPUS

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Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Faithful of Southern Illinois (FOSIL)

Greater Cincinnati Women-Church

National Coalition of American Nuns

New Ways Ministry

San Francisco Bay Area Women-Church

Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference

WomenEucharist Boulder

Women-Church Baltimore

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

Women's Ordination Conference