

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

Women who work for Catholic and other religious employers deserve the same, complete access to contraceptive coverage that HHS has approved for others. Anything less would be discriminatory and contrary to the social justice tradition central to my Catholic faith. I therefore urge you and the Department of Health and Human Services to include comprehensive family planning services for all women as a preventive benefit under the Affordable Care Act.

More than six in ten Catholic voters (63%) support health insurance coverage for contraception, including birth control pills. This is unsurprising, as restrictions to reproductive healthcare access harm Catholics—98 percent of sexually active Catholic women have used a modern method of birth control, mirroring the rates of the population at large (99%).

I have heard the stories of women workers who will be affected by these refusal clauses, women who are trying to support themselves and their families in these tough times. These women include thousands of teachers in Catholic schools and diocesan employees. They also include the spouses and dependents of others working for Catholic institutions, who may share insurance plans with their loved ones. All of these women provide the backbone of our Catholic community, even if they are not Catholic themselves. I cannot in good conscience support any rule that would treat them as second-class citizens unworthy of the same full access to comprehensive family planning coverage that other women receive.

You have heard recently from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and other conservative Catholics on this issue. They are speaking neither for me nor the majority of the 68 million Catholics in the US. Rather than allowing their employees to follow their own consciences in making healthcare decisions, the bishops are attempting to impose their personal beliefs on everybody.

I respect the consciences of the bishops. I just expect them, in keeping with the teachings of our Catholic faith, to respect my conscience and the consciences of the women who work for them, too.

Sincerely,

Ms. Sara Hutchinson
Washington, DC