

From: r_e_rutkowski
To: E-OHPSCA2713.EBSA
Subject: "Religious refusal" exemptions
Date: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 6:46:39 PM

Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
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Re: "Religious refusal" exemptions

Dear Secretary:

Efforts are underway to expand "religious refusal" exemptions. If expanded, certain employers would be exempt from having to provide coverage for contraceptive services to their female employees if the employer is opposed to contraception.

An expanded exemption would allow an employer to deny their employees access to care that doctors, medical associations, and the IOM consider necessary. Besides, with or without an employer exemption, if an *employee* is opposed to contraception on religious grounds, she's unlikely to fill a prescription for birth control. But these exemptions are also a little sinister.

Religious refusal provisions allow the decision makers at "religious employers" to determine what sort of contraception, if any, their female employees will have access to. If the existing religious refusal exemption is expanded, it would create a broad definition for "religious employers," and could impact all employees at some schools, hospitals, charities, and elsewhere – even if the employee does not share the faith of their employer.

Accept the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine as pertain to coverage of preventive care under the new health care law, and to reject any exemptions for "religious employers." These preventive services are a critical element of the new law and would provide countless women better access to necessary health care.

While I believe that "religious refusal" exemptions unjustly deny women access to contraceptive services, others, driven by an ideological distaste for all contraceptive services, are pushing the government to make exemptions even larger. Indeed, some groups are pushing for the exemption to apply to religiously-run health providers, so hospitals with religious affiliations would be exempt from the coverage requirement, even though they employ people of all faiths and ideologies. If granted, this larger exemption would deny access to thousands of women just because of where they work.

I urge you to ensure women have access to quality preventive care by accepting IOM's recommendations and rejecting the proposed religious refusal exemption provisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring these remarks to your attention.

Yours sincerely,
Robert E. Rutkowski

cc: House Minority Leadership

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