Archbishop Kurtz Provides Initial Response to Revised HHS Mandate Regulations

Disappointed that regulation will not expand exemption, only modifies ‘accommodation’
Extending ‘accommodation’ to exempted businesses reduces religious freedom
More thorough study and detailed comments to come

August 22, 2014

WASHINGTON–Today, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that it is issuing an additional set of interim final rules to implement its requirement that health plans, including employer-sponsored plans, provide for sterilization, contraception, and drugs that can cause an abortion. In response, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), provided the following statement:

“The Administration is once again revising its regulations on the HHS mandate. We will study the regulations carefully and will provide more detailed comments at a later date. In keeping with our practice, we will evaluate the regulations according to the principles set forth in ‘United for Religious Freedom,’ a March 2012 statement of the USCCB Administrative Committee that was later affirmed unanimously by the body of bishops at the General Assembly of June 2012.

“On initial review of the government's summary of the regulations, we note with disappointment that the regulations would not broaden the “religious employer” exemption to encompass all employers with sincerely held religious objections to the mandate. Instead, the regulations would only modify the “accommodation,” under which the mandate still applies and still requires provision of the objectionable coverage. Also, by proposing to extend the “accommodation” to the closely held for-profit employers that were wholly exempted by the Supreme Court’s recent decision in Hobby Lobby, the proposed regulations would effectively reduce, rather than expand, the scope of religious freedom.”

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