



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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NEWS RELEASE

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Archdiocese of Washington Files Lawsuit Defending Religious Freedom

Joins 43 Catholic Institutions Nationwide to Preserve Religious Freedom, Mission of the Church

Today, the Archdiocese of Washington filed a legal action in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to challenge the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) unprecedented mandate dramatically redefining religious ministry and requiring religious organizations to provide coverage for drugs and procedures in direct conflict with their religious beliefs. Archbishop Carroll High School, Inc.; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, Inc.; the Consortium of Catholic Academies of the Archdiocese of Washington, Inc.; and The Catholic University of America are also plaintiffs in the same action. This local lawsuit is one of 12 actions filed nationwide today, on behalf of 43 separate Catholic institutions around the country.

The archdiocese's complaint maintains that the HHS mandate violates the First Amendment and federal law by forcing the plaintiffs, all Catholic organizations, to sacrifice their beliefs in order to be able to continue their mission of serving all people in need. Specifically, the suit stems from the mandate's new definition of what constitutes a religious organization. Contrary to long-standing precedent, the law exempts from the mandate only those religious institutions that primarily serve and employ individuals of their own faith. Any other religious organizations, like Catholic schools, universities, hospitals and charities that serve all individuals regardless of their faith, do not themselves qualify as religious for purposes of the exemption. Consequently, the HHS mandate forces these organizations to act in direct violation of their Catholic beliefs.

"For the first time in this country's history, the government's new definition of religious institutions suggests that some of the very institutions that put our faith into practice—schools, hospitals, and social service organizations—are not 'religious enough,'" said Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington. "Catholic institutions of the Archdiocese of Washington, including its schools and social service ministries, do not qualify as religious and the mandate forces them to provide coverage for drugs and procedures that we believe are morally wrong," Cardinal Wuerl said.

The current law states that a Catholic institution is exempt from the mandate only if the federal government determines that the inculcation of religious values is the purpose of the organization and that it mainly serves and employs Catholics. So, the mandate gives special power to a federal government official to regulate and investigate religious organizations and their ministries. The archdiocese's complaint maintains that this government interference with the free exercise of religion violates the First Amendment.

"There is no way out of the dilemma the mandate forces upon us. Catholic schools, universities, hospitals, and social service ministries employ and serve millions of people in this country and do so without regard to their religious beliefs. Under the government's new rules, religious organizations will face an impossible choice," said Jane Belford, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington. "Serving our neighbor is part of our baptismal calling. We do what we do because we are Catholic, not because those

we serve are. We have always asked: Are you hungry? Are you sick? Now, we will be forced to also ask: Are you Catholic?" said Mrs. Belford. "This is wrong. Our mission is to serve the needs of our neighbors regardless of their faith or their beliefs."

Through the legal action filed today, the archdiocese aims to defend through judicial means the fundamental human right to religious freedom. The plaintiffs are seeking a solution supported by the First Amendment and federal law, which permits all religious organizations, not just houses of worship, to follow their religious convictions and continue to serve all who are in need.

For more information, visit www.preservereligiousfreedom.org.

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