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Group Health Plans and Health Insurance Issuers Relating to Coverage of Preventive Services under Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: Amendment

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General Comment

I write this to express my outrage at the bureaucratic violation of individual conscience occurring under the new HHS guidelines.

Under the new HHS guidelines, most health insurance plans in the United States will have to provide the full range of birth control drugs by August 1, 2012. No co-pay can be required. From a fiscal perspective, it is impossible to see how this will bring down health care costs because birth control drugs are extremely expensive. And more importantly, this regulation will completely eliminate the right of employers to follow their conscience and refuse to offer birth control drugs to their employees in company-funded health care plans. Many employers object to using their company resources to pay for birth control, and many more strongly object to using company resources to pay for abortion-inducing drugs like "Ella" and the "morning after pill."

The included religious exemption is extremely narrow and will only apply to churches and other houses of worship, and possibly denominational seminaries. Religious organizations, most religious colleges, and other religious employers who have conscientious objections to offering birth control or abortion-inducing drugs will be forced to choose between abhorrent options. They will have to decide whether to end their insurance programs—which will hurt millions of employees across the nation—or violate their conscience by including birth control and abortion-inducing drugs in their insurance programs.

I have grave concerns with this narrow religious exemption. I believe that it should be broadened to not only include houses of worship, but also religious organizations, religious colleges, and employer-funded private health insurance plans if the employer has a conscientious objection to using corporate funds to pay for birth control or abortion-inducing drugs.