



May 21, 2012

## **The Diocese of Joliet Joins Other Plaintiffs to Get HHS Mandate Overturned**

Along with 43 Catholic dioceses, Catholic schools and universities, Catholic health systems and Catholic charitable organizations from around the country, the Diocese of Joliet, along with the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois and their Catholic Charities, today filed a lawsuit. This is one of a total of 12 lawsuits on this matter – against the various federal agencies responsible for formulating and enforcing the nationwide mandate that requires religious institutions to facilitate and fund activities that their religious and moral convictions forbid. The Health and Human Services mandate was made final on Feb. 15 and is scheduled to go into effect on Aug. 1, 2012 for some and Aug. 1, 2013 for others.

The U.S. bishops have been calling others to action to defend religious liberty for several months now. They have called for prayer, for clergy to speak about religious liberty, for laity to get involved, and they have outlined their position in a document called "Our First, Most Cherished Freedom." For more information, go to the following site: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/>.

This lawsuit is about an unprecedented attack by the federal government on one of America's most cherished freedoms: the freedom to practice one's religion without government interference. It is not about whether people have access to certain services; it is about whether the government may force religious institutions and individuals to facilitate and fund services which violate their religious beliefs.

The HHS mandate that all employers provide abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraceptives includes only a narrow exemption for certain organizations that the government deems sufficiently "religious." The exemption applies only if the government determines that all four of the following criteria are met: the inculcation of religious values is the purpose of the organization; the organization primarily employs persons who share the religious tenets of the organization; the organization primarily serves persons who share the religious tenets of the organization; *and* the organization falls within a certain tax code provision defining a narrow subset of religious non-profits

This exemption runs contrary to decades of federal laws that have consistently honored and respected the conscience rights of religious institutions and individuals. The HHS mandate jeopardizes religious freedom – a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution – and undermines access to a wide range of social services. Catholic schools, universities, hospitals, and social service agencies engage in the service of educating and caring for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The mandate jeopardizes all of these good works by forcing these Catholic institutions to violate their religious beliefs.

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