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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ILLINOIS CATHOLIC LEADERS URGE HHS TO RESCIND RULES MANDATING CONTRACEPTIVES COVERAGE, CRITICIZE NARROW EXEMPTION FOR RELIGIOUS EMPLOYERS

CHICAGO – Leaders of the state’s six Catholic dioceses today called for Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to revoke new rules mandating insurance coverage of contraceptives and sterilization that also create an extremely narrow definition of religious organizations eligible for exemption.

In a letter to Sebelius, the six bishops object to the infringement of religious freedom, noting the new regulations undermine 40 years of bipartisan agreement in protecting religious rights of conscience. They underscored the importance the Catholic faith places on the sanctity of new human life and its prosperity to society. “The government’s treatment of pregnancy as a disease to be prevented or terminated on any whim undermines not only our teaching but also the respect for human sexuality and human life intrinsic to well-ordered society,” the bishops write.

The Catholic leaders also raised an alarm about the rules’ narrow definition of a religious organization eligible to qualify for an exemption from the mandate. The rules apply only to religious employers that meet the extremely narrow criteria of (1) having the purpose of teaching religious values, (2) primarily hiring persons who share the organizations’ religious tenets, (3) primarily serving people who share those tenets and (4) being a nonprofit as described in the Internal Revenue Code.

“As Catholics, our foundational belief in ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ motivates us to serve the public good and those in need. However, this rule stipulates the Church’s service can be offered only if our

teachings and conscience are simultaneously violated. The impossible dilemma arising from the rule requires either the forced withdrawal of the Catholic Church from public ministry or the violation of deeply-held religious belief," the bishops state.

If Sebelius refuses to rescind the rules, the bishops ask that she modify the regulations to include accommodations for religious organizations.

HHS is accepting public comment on the rules until Sept. 30, and Illinois residents are urged to raise their concerns. Comments may be submitted to the department:

-- Electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=HHS-OS-2011-0023-0002>.

-- By regular mail to: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Department of Health and Human Services, Attention: CMS-9992-IFC2, P.O. Box 8010, Baltimore, MD 21244-8010. (Please allow sufficient time for mailed comments to be received before the close of the comment period.)

-- By express or overnight mail to: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Department of Health and Human Services, Attention: CMS-9992-IFC2, Mail Stop C4-26-05, 7500 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, MD 21244-1850.

-- By hand or courier.

The Catholic Conference of Illinois has created a set of talking points to assist in the submission of comments, which can be found at www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org.

The letter from the six dioceses is attached to this email in both PDF and Word documents.

Formed in 1969 by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Illinois, the Catholic Conference of Illinois is the agent through which the diocese of Illinois may act mutually and cooperatively in matters of interdiocesan and statewide interest. CCI is a board-approved administration with legislative priorities.

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