

# MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE WEST END PLACE

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October 18, 2011

The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch  
United States House of Representatives  
2348 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lynch,

We write as the four Roman Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts serving the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. We write to urge your support for the protection of rights of conscience as provided in HR 1179, commonly known as the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.

The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act was introduced earlier this year by Representative Jeff Fortney, Republican of Nebraska and Representative Dan Boren, Democrat of Oklahoma. This Act will help preserve freedom of conscience, which has been meticulously safeguarded in other federal laws throughout the history of the United States.

The pending mandate adopted by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requires that private health insurance plans provide coverage of all FDA-approved contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, and educational services regarding such methods and procedures. This will mark the first time the federal government has required private health plans to include such coverage. This mandate directly conflicts with the religious beliefs of institutions and individuals that have a strong moral objection to such practices, such as the Catholic Church and its members.

Regardless of any one person's beliefs about the specific issues of contraception and abortion, it is objectionable that people of faith should be forced to act in a manner contrary to their moral convictions in receiving and providing health coverage. The proposed mandate would impose such an obligation on any religious institution that wishes to continue to employ and serve peoples of all faiths, as well as an unwarranted burden on our ability to freely practice our religious beliefs. It is fundamentally contrary to the Constitution and the foundational beliefs of the United States.

We wish to reiterate what Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in his recent letter to Congress regarding this important issue. In his letter of September 7, 2011, Cardinal DiNardo stated, "those who sponsor, purchase and issue health plans should not be forced to violate their deeply held moral and religious convictions in order to take part in the health care system or provide for the needs of their families, their

employers, or those most in need. To force such an unacceptable choice would be as much a threat to universal access to health care as it is to freedom of conscience.”

The proposed religious exemption in the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act will ensure that religious and moral conscience will not be suppressed. We urge you to support HR 1179 to protect the religious freedom of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the United States of America.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

**Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley**  
Archbishop  
Archdiocese of Boston

**Most Rev. George W. Coleman**  
Bishop  
Diocese of Fall River

**Most Rev. Timothy A. McDonnell**  
Bishop  
Diocese of Springfield

**Most Rev. Robert J. McManus**  
Bishop  
Diocese of Worcester