



## THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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July 8, 2016

Members Congress of the United States  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

### **Re: Conscience Protection Act of 2016 (H.R. 4828)**

Dear Member of the House of Representatives:

On April 19, 2016, The National Catholic Bioethics Center (The Center) joined twenty-five other major pro-life, religious, and health care organizations in a letter urging the U.S. House of Representatives to pass the Conscience Protection Act of 2016 (H.R. 4828). Signatories included ten medical groups representing tens of thousands of health care professionals who object to abortion and are seeking legal protection to serve their patients in good conscience. In that [letter](#) we identified the escalating violations of religious freedom that necessitate the passing of this Act.

The Center is a non-profit research and educational institute committed to applying the moral teachings of the Catholic Church to ethical issues arising in health care and the life sciences. The Center provides consultations to institutions and individuals seeking its opinion on the appropriate application of Catholic moral teachings to these ethical issues. The Center has 2500 members (many of whom are institutional members representing thousands of persons) throughout the United States. These members are constituents of the members of Congress.

The Center has cited how the state of California has demanded that all health plans under the jurisdiction of the state's Department of Managed Health Care -- even those purchased by churches and other religious organizations -- cover elective abortions for any reason, including late-term abortions and those performed for reasons of "sex selection." The New York State Department of Financial Services has followed suit, and neither state allows any type of exemption. Those whose rights have been violated by California policy filed an appeal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Since our letter to you of April 19, 2016, and despite the fact that this policy flagrantly violates the Weldon amendment, which has been part of the annual Labor/HHS appropriations laws for over a decade, HHS refused to take any action on the appeal.

Also, since our previous letter to you, there are additional violations of religious liberty being perpetrated by government entities, further stressing the importance of enacting the Conscience Protection Act of 2016:

On June 21, 2016, the [Skagit County Superior Court](#) [Washington State] ordered that all public hospitals which provide maternity care must offer abortions. But no physician or nurse wishes to perform them. Clearly, to carry out this mandate, health care providers' consciences will be compromised in violation of the Church and Weldon Amendments.

The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a conscience rights case raised by the Stroman's family, owners of a pharmacy in Washington, who challenged a state rule requiring them to dispense abortion-causing drugs. [Justice Samuel Alito](#), who wrote a dissent, called the case an "ominous sign," and said that if the case is an indication of how religious liberty claims will be handled by the court in the coming years, "those who value religious freedom have cause for great concern."

The National Catholic Bioethics Center provides a consultation service on bioethical dilemmas encountered in the delivery of health care. We receive over 1800 such requests annually. Increasingly these requests are from health care providers, or those considering careers in health care delivery, questioning whether they can be providers because of the escalating violations of religious liberty of health care professionals. Such violations include the case of [Kathy Cenzone-DeCarlo](#) (forced to assist in an abortion by Mount Sinai Hospital in New York), and the cases of nurses in [Nassau University Medical Center](#) and at the [University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey](#), all threatened with discipline for refusing to participate in abortion. It will be a catastrophic day in the delivery of health care if the only persons able to provide care in the healing professions are those who place the mandates of written law above the guidance of moral conscience. As assisted suicide laws are advancing in the United States, all one has to do is to look to [Belgium](#) and the [Netherlands](#) to witness the abuses of the vulnerable, when whatever is legal becomes ethical, and then enabling legislation becomes a mandate, as in [Belgium](#). Also, look no further than to the north, to [Canada](#), to witness how physicians opposed to physician-assisted suicide are being forced to participate in it.

Never before has there been so great a need for federal legislation to protect not only the religious freedom of health care providers and health care agencies, but also to protect those they serve from professionals who are willing to violate the very lives the healing professions have been commissioned to protect.

We urge your passage of the Conscience Protection Act of 2016 (H.R. 4828).

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marie T. Hilliard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Marie T. Hilliard, JCL, PhD., RN  
Director of Bioethics and Public Policy