

On March 31, 2009, Archbishop John J. Myers, as the President of the New Jersey Catholic Conference, submitted the following comments to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health Science.

The statement expresses the strong opposition of the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey to the proposed rescission of the federal regulation entitled “Ensuring That Department of Health and Human Services Funds Do Not Support Coercive or Discriminatory Policies or Practices in Violation of Federal Law.”

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey
New Jersey Catholic Conference
149 North Warren Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08608

March 31, 2009

We the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, Shepherds to over 3.5 million Catholics in seven dioceses, submit these comments to ask the federal government to retain the conscience regulations protecting the right of health care providers to serve patients without violating their moral and religious convictions. These conscience rights are human rights – not rights created or granted by Congress. The federal government has a special responsibility to ensure that these human rights are fully protected.

We emphasize that freedom of conscience and religious liberty have been building blocks of American society since the nation’s founding. Our nation respects conscientious objection for those opposed to war and we respect the objection of physicians opposed to taking part in capital punishment. We can do no less for those who oppose abortion.

The fact is that the current conscience regulations do not threaten anyone’s access to health care. Rather, the regulations allow health care providers to serve the public without violating their consciences. As such, the regulations enhance access to health care, by ensuring continued participation of dedicated health professionals who will not be forced to violate their consciences.

Forcing health professionals to be involved in abortion activities against their will would irreparably damage our healing professions and undermine efforts for health care reform. Moreover, abortion cannot be seen as “standard” health care. Abortion is a direct attack not just on the health but on the life of the defenseless unborn, whose right to life must be protected.

Please register our opposition to the rescission of the current conscience regulations as proposed in the March 10, 2009 *Federal Register*.

Most Reverend John J. Myers
Archbishop of Newark

Most Reverend William C. Skurla
Bishop of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

Most Reverend Joseph A. Galante
Bishop of Camden

Most Reverend Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop of Metuchen

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli
Bishop of Paterson

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend John M. Smith
Bishop of Trenton

Most Reverend Thomas A. Donato
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend John W. Flesey
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend Manuel Aurelio Cruz
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese (currently vacant)