

A Conscience Protection Act Is Absolutely Necessary

On July 13, the House is scheduled to vote on the Conscience Protection Act of 2016. It would amend the Public Health Service Act to “codify the prohibition against the federal government and state and local governments that receive federal financial assistance for health-related activities penalizing or discriminating against a health care provider based on the provider’s refusal to be involved in, or provide coverage for, abortion.”

The bill is necessitated by a series of decisions forcing health care providers to cover elective abortions, including late-term abortions. Two years ago, California ordered all health care providers, including Catholic entities, to provide for abortion coverage in their health care plans.

Complainants then appealed to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and on June 21 HHS sided with California law, refusing to intervene. Thus did it expressly violate federal law on this subject. After the California law was passed, New York State passed a similar measure forcing employers to cover abortions, providing no exemptions.

This is lawlessness. The Weldon Amendment, a federal provision, makes it illegal for states that receive federal funds to discriminate against health-care providers that refuse to participate in abortions; it includes health insurers.

Conscience protection is the most elementary exercise of our First Amendment right to religious liberty. If it can be violated, especially in cases involving life and death, all rights can be violated.

There is only one morally defensible, and legally

unassailable, position to take on the Conscience Protection Act of 2016, and we hope all members of the House vote to affirm it.

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