

Religious Liberty Scores a Victory in Congress

Wednesday, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted S. 304, otherwise known as the *Conscience Protection Act*.

Among other things, the bill, if signed into law, would provide legal recourse to those who refuse to participate in or condone abortions. It also would permanently codify a prohibition on federal, state or local governments discriminating against or penalizing health care providers that refuse to provide abortion coverage.

Upon the successful vote, one of the bill's champions in Congress, U.S. Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.), issued the following statement:

"As a father, a Baptist pastor and a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve, I believe we have a sacred responsibility to protect the lives of unborn children. Our current laws need to be strengthened for those who share these same beliefs, especially in light of this Administration's repeated attacks on pro-life policies. Conscience rights are too often not being protected.

"Cathy [Cenzon-DeCarlo], a nurse at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City, was forced to participate in the dismemberment of an unborn child against her religious convictions. Ms. DeCarlo was told by Mt. Sinai staff she could not opt out of participating in the procedure under penalty of losing her job.

It took a formal complaint to Health and Human Services, a lawsuit and three years to get Mt. Sinai to admit they were in the wrong. This legislation will help protect people like Ms. DeCarlo by granting people with strong convictions about the sanctity of life access to legal recourse in the event an

organization or individual forces them to violate their sincere moral beliefs.

“In 2014, California mandated that all health plans—even those purchased by religious institutions—cover elective abortions for any reason. No exemptions were allowed. Instead of enforcing the law, HHS has refused to take action, claiming instead that insurance companies are not covered by the Weldon Amendment since they have no moral or religious objection to abortion coverage.

“The Conscience Protection Act would also allow insurance companies and plans purchased by religious organizations to opt out of covering or paying for medical procedures like abortion that violate their religious convictions.

“No one should be forced by the government to destroy the lives of innocent unborn children. I firmly believe that every life has value, and that every child deserves a birthday.”