

Notre Dame Challenges US Contraceptive Mandate in Lawsuit

The University of Notre Dame filed a lawsuit on Tuesday challenging mandatory coverage of contraception under U.S. federal healthcare laws that it said run contrary to the Catholic university's **religious** beliefs.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in South Bend, Indiana, followed university discussions with the Obama Administration that sought an expanded exception for schools and universities from the requirement, Notre Dame said.

"This lawsuit is about one of America's most cherished freedoms: the freedom to practice one's religion without government interference," Notre Dame said in the lawsuit filed on Tuesday that asks a judge to block the requirement.

The 2010 Affordable Care Act, popularly known as **Obamacare**, requires employers to provide health insurance policies with cover preventive services for women including access to contraception and sterilization.

The act makes an exception for religious institutions such as houses of **worship** that mainly serve and employ members of their own faith, but not schools like Notre Dame, hospitals and charitable organizations that employ people of all faiths.

The Notre Dame lawsuit follows the U.S. Supreme Court's announcement in November that it would hear appeals from two businesses whose owners said the mandatory coverage of contraception violates their religious beliefs.

Notre Dame had challenged the mandate in May 2012, but a federal judge dismissed that lawsuit because the rules were

not yet final. They became final in June.

Rev. John Jenkins, Notre Dame's president, on Tuesday said in a statement that at its core the lawsuit was about the freedom of a religious organization to live its mission and went beyond a debate about contraceptive services.

Notre Dame's employee health plan covers about 11,000 people including employees and dependents and a student health program covers about 2,700 people, it said.

The plans do not cover abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives when they are used to prevent pregnancy, or sterilization. The plans do not appear to meet exceptions allowed for religious entities, Notre Dame said.

Those services will continue to be freely available in the United State outside of Notre Dame, and the university was not seeking to impose its religious beliefs on others.

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