

Obama Administration Offers Religious Employers Contraceptives Opt-Out

The Obama administration on Friday offered a compromise on controversial new health care rules that would allow religious employers to exclude contraceptives from health insurance for their employees, but would still guarantee those employees access to free coverage for birth control.

The proposed compromise follows months of protest and legal action by the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant evangelicals and others groups who argued that the President Barack Obama's health care reform law forced them to violate religious tenets against contraception.

For more than a year, the **Obama administration** has been grappling with how to balance its desire to guarantee universal, free contraceptive coverage with **religious freedoms** provided in the U.S. Constitution. Obama in February said he would create some sort of exemption for religious employers.

Catholics United, a group with a history of supporting liberal causes, applauded the move.

"This is a victory not only for the Obama administration, but for the **Catholic Church**," said James Salt, executive director of Catholics United.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement that the rules offer religiously affiliated hospitals, universities and charities opposed to contraceptives coverage "an accommodation." Employees and students could enroll in separate contraceptive coverage plans without co-pays and without cost to the employer.

Self-insured employers would provide notice to a third-party administrator that would then work with an insurer to arrange no-cost contraceptive coverage through separate individual health insurance policies, HHS said.

The proposed rules, published in the Federal Register, are open for public comment through April 8.

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