

Obama Asks US High Court to Review Contraception Mandate Ruling

The **Obama administration** on Thursday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review the legality of a politically volatile provision of the 2010 federal health care law requiring employers to provide health insurance that covers birth control.

The administration wants the high court to reverse a June decision by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver favoring arts and crafts retailer Hobby Lobby Stores Inc. That decision said for-profit companies can sometimes assert religious rights if they do not wish to comply with a federal regulation.

Separately, a Christian legal group called the Alliance Defending Freedom filed a petition on Thursday seeking review of a different appeals court ruling in which the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia ruled against the employer.

The group filed on behalf of a Mennonite-owned company in Pennsylvania, Conestoga Wood Specialties.

The fact that federal appeals courts are split on the issue and parties on both sides want the **Supreme Court** to weigh in would indicate the court is likely to decide to take up the issue. A ruling would be expected in the court's new term, which starts in October and ends in June 2014.

The legal question about the so-called "**contraception mandate**" was not before the court when it upheld the healthcare law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, in a June 2012 ruling.

In the government's petition in the **Hobby Lobby** case, Solicitor General Donald Verrilli said the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—which is the law cited by the company—is designed to protect individuals and religious institutions.

He said it is not intended to be “a sword used to deny employees of for-profit commercial enterprises the benefits and protections of generally applicable laws.”

Lawyers for Alliance Defending Freedom said in the second petition that their clients, the Hahn family, “object as a matter of conscience to facilitating certain contraceptives that they believe can destroy human life.”

The administration's petition is *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, No. 13-354. The other case, which does not yet have a number, is *Conestoga Wood Specialties v. Sebelius*.

Reporting by Lawrence Hurley; Editing by Kevin Drawbaugh and Eric Walsh

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