

Religious, Academic Leaders Call HHS Mandate 'Unacceptable'

More than 500 people have signed a statement rejecting the Obama administration's Health and Human Service mandate. In the latest of religious and academic scholars to support the statement, His Eminence, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Archbishop of New York, signed his name on Monday.

In response to President Obama's announcement of a government compromise over the new controversial mandate requiring employers to pay for abortion-causing drugs and other services, the letter, titled "Unacceptable," says this is "a grave violation of religious freedom and cannot stand."

It continues: "It is an insult to the intelligence of ... people of faith and conscience to imagine that they will accept an assault on their religious liberty if only it is covered up by a cheap accounting trick."

After a dispute broke out over the HHS mandate, the administration replied by saying religious organizations would not have to pay for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraception, but instead all insurance companies will be required to do so. Once a religious employer purchases insurance—which it is required to do by law—the insurance company will then contact insured employees to advise them of the terms of the policy.

"It does not matter *who* explains the terms of policy purchased by the religiously affiliated or observant employer," the statement argues. "What matters is what services the policy covers."

Under this new rule, the letter says, “the government still coerces religious institutions and individuals to purchase insurance policies that include the very same services.”

Signed by leading scholars, university presidents, and other academic administrators, activists and religious leaders from a multitude of faiths, the statement also says Obama’s “so-called ‘accommodation’” of religious liberty changes nothing of moral substance.

Not every signatory agrees on the morality of the use of contraception, sterilization and abortifacient drugs. What unites them is the conviction that the government should not coerce religious institutions or individuals into violating their most deeply held beliefs as a condition of serving or employing those who do not share their faith.

The original drafters of the letter are Harvard’s Mary Ann Glendon, Princeton’s Robert P. George, Notre Dame’s Carter Snead, Catholic University of America’s president John Garvey and Yuval Levin, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.