



RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

21 CHARLES STREET • WESTPORT, CT 06880 • 203-222-0055 • WWW.RELIGIOUSINSTITUTE.ORG

Contact:

J. Michael Cobb

203-222-0055

cobb@religiousinstitute.org

Religious Institute Statement on Bishops' Rejection of White House Accommodation: "Stop Playing Politics with Women's Reproductive Health"

February 13, 2012—The Religious Institute, a multi-faith organization dedicated to sexual health, education and justice, has issued a statement regarding the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops rejection of the White House accommodation on birth control access in health insurance, seeing it as further evidence that their concern is not religious liberty, but playing politics with women's lives.

"The Roman Catholic Bishops are continuing to play politics with women's reproductive health and women's lives," said the Rev. Debra W. Haffner, Executive Director of the Religious Institute. "Under the White House plan, Roman Catholic institutions do not have to financially support contraceptive care; no woman has to use it. Cloaking their anti-women's sexuality view in religious liberty arguments is nothing more than trying to do with health insurance reform what they have not been able to do from the pulpit: deny women access to modern contraceptives. The Roman Catholic Bishops do not speak for religion on contraception."

Last week, twenty-four major national mainstream religious leaders released a statement supporting the decision by the White House that contraceptive services must be covered by insurance policies without deductibles or co-pays, and that only purely sectarian organizations—churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples—will be exempt from this requirement. The signers of this letter come from 23 national organizations that represent millions of religious leaders and people of faith across the country.

There is nothing new about religious organizations supporting the provision of contraception and women's moral agency to decide when, whether, and if to use birth control. More than 20 denominations have policies affirming birth control, passed as early as 1959.

There is an authentic, historically grounded religious Jewish and Christian perspective that supports access to birth control. It is precisely because of our religious belief that life is sacred, that we commit ourselves to assuring that it is created intentionally through the use of, and access to, contraceptive services. It is our beliefs as religious leaders from distinct traditions that we affirm that individuals must have the moral agency to make decisions about their sexuality and reproductive health without governmental interference or legal restrictions. Our belief in religious liberty and the separation of church and state means that we understand that no single religious voice should speak for all faith traditions on contraception or other sexuality issues, nor that the government should ever take sides on religious differences, including assuring that women regardless of their employers or where they attend university have basic preventive health care services covered. Just as Jehovah Witnesses who run secular institutions must cover blood transfusions for their employees, and Christian Scientists who run secular institutions must offer health insurance at all, so must Catholic hospitals and universities provide health insurance that cover all preventive health care services to their employees and students.

The Religious Institute, based in Westport, CT, is a nonprofit, multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education and justice in faith communities and society. More than 5,400 clergy, seminary presidents and deans, religious scholars and other religious leaders representing more than 70 faith traditions are part of the Religious Institute's national network.