



**May 23, 2012**

## **STATEMENT ON HHS MANDATE LAWSUITS**

On Monday, May 21, a total of 43 Catholic dioceses, schools and universities, health systems, and charitable organizations filed lawsuits against the federal agencies responsible for the mandate requiring religious institutions and others to provide insurance coverage for activities contrary to their religious convictions.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati is not a party to these lawsuits, nor is it necessary for every diocese to join the suits in order for them to be effective. The various plaintiffs reflect a broad cross-section of Catholic institutions, and together they represent the wide variety of issues, impacts, economic consequences, and divergent facts that exist among Catholic organizations nationwide. As Archbishop of Cincinnati, I wish to voice my support for this litigation and my gratitude to the leadership of the institutions involved.

The Church did not seek this fight or its timing; the federal government did. Under the regulations announced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services earlier this year, almost all employers will be *forced* to offer their employees' health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be *forced* to include those "services" in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be *forced* to buy that coverage as a part of their policies. There is only a narrow exemption for certain organizations that the government deems sufficiently religious. This is an unprecedented attack by the government on the freedom to practice one's religion without government interference.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been seeking relief from this mandate since it was first discussed in 2010. Unfortunately, talks with the White House and a bi-partisan legislative effort were not successful. HHS finalized its rule "without change" on February 15. A promised "accommodation" in reality would not address the central issue. Litigation, therefore, became the only way left to fight for our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion.

Let us be clear that it is not only the rights of Catholics that are threatened by the HHS mandate. As many other Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish leaders have recognized, every religious organization and every individual should be concerned that the federal government believes it has the right to force its citizens to violate their conscience.

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Archbishop of Cincinnati