



February 7, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are writing you today about a very serious matter which deserves our attention and concern. New and proposed laws at both the state and national level pose an unprecedented threat to the fundamental right to religious liberty for all faith traditions. This threat undermines our country's First Amendment guarantees protecting the conscience rights of all citizens.

- The federal government recently announced that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs and contraception as “preventive” health services.
- This year the Washington State Legislature is considering bills that would mandate coverage for abortions in health insurance plans that provide maternity care coverage.
- Should the same-sex “marriage” bill be signed into law, we continue to be concerned that conscience provisions effectively provide protection to churches and religious organizations.

In addition to these threats, at the state level, based on an Attorney General’s 2002 opinion, the insurance commissioner affirmed his mandate that all state-regulated healthcare plans must cover contraceptives even if an employer has a religious or conscientious objection. This state mandate was bad enough. The federal mandate issued several weeks ago by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is much worse.

Under this unprecedented federal mandate, almost all health insurers will be required to include contraception, abortion-inducing drugs, and sterilization as “preventive” services in the health policies they write, and almost all individuals and employers will be forced to buy that coverage as a part of their policies. Moreover, the religious exemption to this mandate is so narrow that it would virtually require that the Catholic Church and Catholic institutions hire and serve only Catholics.

In a very grave violation of our religious liberty, the proposed abortion-insurance mandate before the Washington State Legislature similarly would place the Church, Catholic health care and all Catholic organizations and employers in an absolutely impossible situation.

We, the bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle, have an obligation to make you aware of the seriousness of the situation and to ask for prayer and action to turn back these efforts to deny our constitutionally guaranteed right to religious liberty as a church. In generations past, the people of God, the Church, has always stood up to protect our sacred rights. Today we are again called upon to stand up for these rights. We will do so as loyal Americans and loyal Catholics.

We therefore ask two things of all Catholic people:

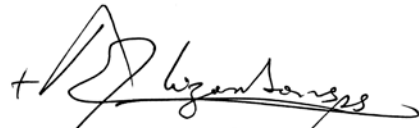
- First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and sacrifices, that wisdom and justice may prevail, and that religious liberty may be respected. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible.
- Second, we urge you to visit [www.usccb.org/conscience](http://www.usccb.org/conscience), and [www.thewssc.org/](http://www.thewssc.org/) to learn more about this onslaught against religious liberty, and how you can contact your congressional and state legislative representatives to oppose these attacks on our religious liberty.

We cannot stand idly by while these assaults on our religious liberty are being perpetrated. Please join us in expressing to both federal and state officials our grave concern and strong objections.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain  
Archbishop of Seattle

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Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.  
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle