



## A Statement from the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors

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*Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) is the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state. Founded in 1963, MCC presents the Michigan Catholic bishops' advocacy positions to the executive and legislative branches of state government. In 1970, MCC began to provide employees of the state's seven arch/dioceses and their institutions with a medical insurance benefit. Today, over 10,000 Catholic institution employees and their dependents receive the medical benefit from MCC.*

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On February 15, 2012, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) finalized a mandate that requires all employers to provide in their health benefit plans abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and artificial contraception, all of which are a violation of the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human person. The HHS mandate includes an exemption for certain groups, but is crafted so narrowly that most religious organizations, including the Michigan Catholic Conference, do not qualify.

The mandate and its exemption run contrary to centuries of federal laws that have consistently honored and respected the conscience rights of religious institutions and individuals. The exemption, which includes a four-part test developed by HHS, allows for a government entity to define who is and who is not "religious." By defining who is and who is not religious enough to qualify for an exemption to the mandate, HHS has conferred powers on government forbidden by the U.S. Constitution.

In order to defend its First Amendment right to religious freedom, and to prevent the government from excessively entangling itself into the internal life of religious practice, Michigan Catholic Conference on Monday, May 21, 2012 filed a lawsuit against the federal government over the HHS mandate. The various federal agencies responsible for formulating and enforcing the nationwide mandate are named as defendants in the complaint. Additional information related to this matter, including audio and video materials, may be found at [www.micatholicconference.org](http://www.micatholicconference.org).

While some incorrectly hold that "separation of Church and State" refers to keeping the Church out of the public square, the Founding Fathers actually sought to guarantee that the state must remain separate from the internal affairs of the Church—an ideal that today is threatened by the HHS mandate. Michigan Catholic Conference will not compromise or acquiesce to an unjust government mandate that places our nation's first, most cherished freedom, in grave peril. As President Thomas Jefferson stated in 1809: "No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to men than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprise of the civil authority."