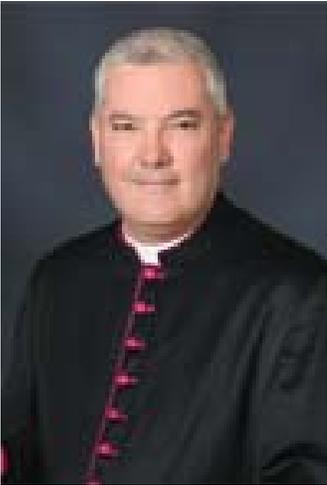


Latest on the HHS Mandate



Msgr. Michael M. Boland

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago announced that it has joined an ongoing lawsuit in federal court, seeking to overturn the mandate issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The mandate within the Affordable Care Act passed by the Obama administration would require religious institutions to cover sterilization, contraception and abortifacient drugs. The "religious employer" exemption within the mandate is limited only to institutions serving members of their own church. In a statement released by Catholic Charities, the organization noted that in order to receive an exemption from the mandate, "Catholic Charities must abandon its longstanding commitment, rooted in its Catholic faith, to serve the poor regardless of their religion. The sole matter at hand is that religious freedom has been compromised by the mandate in violation of the First Amendment of our nation's Constitution," said Monsignor Michael Boland, CEO of Catholic Charities. Regarding the limited exemption to the HHS mandate, Monsignor Boland added that "HHS fails to understand that there is no distinction between our Catholic faith and our commitment to serve the needs of all people regardless of their religion.

We support health care reform and efforts to expand access to health care to all Americans. But we oppose any policy that compels us to compromise our Catholic faith. Make no mistake: This mandate affects all religions and anyone of faith. This is about religious liberty. We must take a stand, not only on behalf of Catholic Charities, but for all faith-based organizations. We must protect our right to serve all the poor, not just those HHS defines for us," Monsignor Boland said.

Cardinal Francis George, archbishop of Chicago, expressed his support for Catholic Charities in a statement released last month. Cardinal George also warned of the effects of the mandate on religious institutions. "This ministry will lose its identity as Catholic unless the HHS mandate now in force as the recent law of the land is changed and the Catholic Church and other religious bodies are given back their constitutional freedom to minister publicly. This is the issue now before a court. It is also the issue before a nation that portrays itself as the 'land of the free,'" he said. The cardinal praised the work of Catholic Charities saying that "this ministry gives flesh to the Church's constant concern for the poor. I am sorry that the intransigence of the Department of Health and Human Services has made it necessary to defend in court what every American could take for granted until this year," he concluded.