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USCCB: HHS mandate 'unprecedented,' must be rescinded

by Nancy Frazier O'Brien by Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- The federal government's mandate that all health insurance plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge "represents an unprecedented attack on religious liberty" and creates "serious moral problems" that require its rescission, attorneys for the U.S. bishops said in comments submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services.

In a 35-page comment submitted Aug. 31, Anthony Picarello and Michael Moses, general counsel and associate general counsel, respectively, for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, called the HHS mandate "unprecedented in federal law and more radical than any state contraceptive mandate enacted to date."

"Only rescission will eliminate all of the serious moral problems the mandate creates," they said. "Only rescission will correct HHS' legally flawed interpretation of the term 'preventive services.'"

The mandate and a proposed religious exemption to it were announced Aug. 1 by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and are subject to a 60-day comment period.

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