NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Military chaplains told not to read archbishop's letter on HHS mandate

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | Feb. 8, 2012

WASHINGTON -- A directive from the U.S. Army chief of chaplains that a letter opposing the Obama administration's contraceptive mandate not be read from the pulpit by Catholic military chaplains violated First Amendment rights of free speech and free exercise of religion, according to the head of the Archdiocese for the Military Services.

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio spoke with Secretary of the Army John McHugh about the chief of chaplains' response to the archbishop's Jan. 26 letter and the two "agreed that it was a mistake to stop the reading of the archbishop's letter," according to a statement released by the military archdiocese to Catholic News Service Feb. 6.

The two also agreed to McHugh's suggestion that one line, which read "We cannot -- we will not -- comply with this unjust law," be removed from the letter because of "the concern that it could potentially be misunderstood as a call to civil disobedience," the statement added.

"The issue was quickly resolved and the archdiocese considers this matter closed," John Schlageter, general counsel for the archdiocese, said in an email to CNS Feb. 7.

Archbishop Broglio's letter had been issued as part of a nationwide campaign by U.S. bishops protesting the Department of Health and Human Services requirement that all health plans -- even those covering employees of Catholic schools, hospitals and charitable institutions -- cover contraceptives, including some that can cause abortions, and sterilization free of charge.

The archbishop said he and the archdiocese "stand firm in the belief, based on legal precedent, that such a directive from the Army constituted a violation of his constitutionally protected right of free speech and the free exercise of religion, as well as those same rights of all military chaplains and their congregants."

The office of the Army chief of chaplains did not immediately respond to a CNS request for comment about the incident.

The military archdiocese said there was no objection to the letter from the other branches of military service.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/29/2017 - 22:13*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/military-chaplains-told-not-read-archbishops-letter-hhs-mandate