

Letter decrying contraception compromise attracts bishops, professors

Joshua J. McElwee | Feb. 14, 2012 NCR Today

A letter calling President Barack Obama's revision of a controversial mandate regarding coverage of contraceptive services in health care plans "morally obtuse" has gained some 215 signatures from a number of notable professors and religious leaders.

Among the signees are Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ken.

The letter, titled "Unacceptable," says the revision of the mandate "fails to remove the assault on religious liberty and the rights of conscience which gave rise to the controversy."

"The simple fact is that the Obama administration is compelling religious people and institutions who are employers to purchase a health insurance contract that provides abortion-inducing drugs, contraception, and sterilization," it continues. "This is a grave violation of religious freedom and cannot stand."

Also among the signees to the letter are professors from several Catholic universities, including Villanova, Gonzaga, Loyola University Chicago, the University of San Diego, The Catholic University of America, and the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

The largest group of signees comes from the University of Notre Dame. Some 60 professors and staff members of the university have attached their names.

Notably, in a statement on the Notre Dame website Friday following announcement of the compromise, University of Notre Dame president Jenkins praised the accommodation, saying it was a "a welcome step toward recognizing the freedom of religious institutions"

While Jenkins said that there "remain a number of unclear and unresolved issues" regarding the compromise, he also said in the statement that "we look forward to joining the U.S. bishops and leaders from other religious institutions to work with the administration to resolve them."

Among the writers and journalists who have signed are R.R. Reno, the editor of *First Things*, Kathryn Jean Lopez with National Review Online, and author George Weigel.

Professors at several Baptist Universities also are represented, as well as the head of the Catholic Medical Association.

Obama's announcement of a revised mandate came after religious groups denounced the original version, saying it violated principles of religious liberty and would force employers of religiously affiliated institutions opposed to birth control -- including Catholic hospitals, charities and schools -- to violate their consciences.

Under the revised plan announced Friday, when an employer affiliated with a religious group declines to provide contraceptive coverage to employees, insurance companies will be required to offer the coverage to

individuals who want it free of charge.

Obama said the new version of the mandate ensures religious institutions will not have to pay for contraceptive services or refer employees to organizations that provide such services.

First released Friday following announcement of the compromise, the letter, which is available on website of the Becket Fund, was originally signed by former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See Mary Ann Glendon; John Garvey, president of The Catholic University of America; Princeton professor Robert George; Notre Dame University law professor Carter Snead; and Yuval Levin, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

For the full text of the letter, [click here](#) [1].

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