

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS
CHRISTIAN
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)
PRESBYTERIANS AFFIRMING REPRODUCTIVE OPTIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY
GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES
WOMEN'S DIVISION

CAUCUSES/ORGANIZATIONS
CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE
CHRISTIAN LESBIANS OUT (CLOUT)
CHURCH OF THE BRETRIC WOMEN'S CAUCUS
DISCIPLES FOR CHOICE
EPISCOPAL URBAN CAUCUS
EPISCOPAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS
LUTHERAN WOMEN'S CAUCUS
METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION

JEWISH

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM
WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM

JEWISH RECONSTRUCTIONIST FEDERATION
RECONSTRUCTIONIST RABBINICAL ASSOCIATION

REFORM JUDAISM

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS
NORTH AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEMPLE YOUTH
UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM
WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM, THE FEDERATION
OF TEMPLE SISTERHOODS
WOMEN'S RABBINIC NETWORK OF THE CENTRAL
CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS
SOCIETY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

CAUCUSES/ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH
HADASSAH, WZOA
JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL
NA'AMAT USA
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN
WOMEN'S AMERICAN ORT

AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

NATIONAL SERVICE CONFERENCE OF THE
AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF
CONGREGATIONS
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST WOMEN'S FEDERATION
YOUTH RELIGIOUS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS
CONTINENTAL UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
YOUTH ADULT NETWORK

YWCA OF THE USA

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**Statement of Reverend Dr. Carlton W. Veazey, President and CEO,
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, on Hearing, "Do New
Health Law Mandates Threaten Conscience Rights and Access to Care?"**

**US House of Representatives
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Health**

November 2, 2011

On behalf of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, thank you for this opportunity to comment on conscience clauses in health care law.

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice was founded in 1973 and is the national organization of Christian, Jewish and other denominations and traditions with official positions in support of a woman's moral right to make decisions about childbearing according to the dictates of her conscience and religion. Member organizations are the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, Women's Division of the United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist Association, the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements of Judaism, and other religious and religiously affiliated organizations.

In October 1974, the board of directors of the Religious Coalition adopted a policy position opposing conscience clauses that remains in place today. It states: "*All religious health institutions upon accepting public funds assume a public trust to affirm in practice the legal options for abortion.*"

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice member organizations hold that medical institutions that 1) employ a diverse workforce, 2) serve a diverse population, 3) have a secular purpose such as the provision of medical care, 4) receive public funds, and 5) are major service providers must be held to their responsibility to serve the public rather than restricting services to conform to their own religious beliefs. Continuously since 1973, the Religious Coalition has opposed religious exemptions for public institutions as a violation of both the separation of church and state and the exercise of individual conscience.

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As a religious coalition that honors individual conscience, we hold that, in keeping with the constitutional right to exercise one's religious beliefs without government interference, individuals should have the right to opt out of performing health care services to which they are religiously or morally opposed. Truly religious institutions—a church, a monastery, a seminary—should also be able to act in accordance with their belief systems.

However, in this pluralistic nation, we are committed to protecting the rights of all. Patients have the right to legal health care services and their access to these services must not be affected by physicians who opt out of providing them. As well, health care providers must not be prohibited from performing services that are legal and necessary.

Institutions operating with public funds and serving the public should not be allowed to impose beliefs about health care on entire communities and all of their patients. This is especially critical in communities where a religiously affiliated institution is the only or main service provider. Such is the case in geographically isolated areas where a growing number of Catholic hospitals have been federally designated as “sole providers,” even though Catholics constitute a minority of the population. Nevertheless, Catholic restrictions on reproductive health care apply to all patients, regardless of their beliefs.

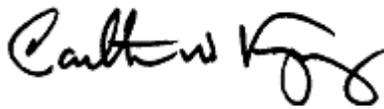
Unnecessary: The proposed religious exemption in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is unnecessary because the right to refuse to perform services that an individual objects to on moral or religious grounds has been enacted in law since 1973 with the Church Amendment. The Church Amendment prevents the government from requiring health care providers or institutions to perform or assist in abortion procedures against their moral or religious convictions. It also prevents institutions that receive federal funds from taking action against employees because of their participation, nonparticipation or beliefs about abortion. In 2004, Congress passed and the president signed the Weldon Amendment, under which a physician or other health care professional, a hospital, a provider-sponsored organization, a health maintenance organization, a health insurance plan, or any other kind of health care facility may refuse abortions, counseling, or referrals, even in cases of rape, incest, or medical emergency.

Unconstitutional: By failing to offer an equivalent protection for service providers and patients, the religious exemption unconstitutionally restricts the ability of women to obtain services and medical personnel to provide services. It is important

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to note that many religions support a woman's right to access reproductive health care, including abortion and contraception, as a matter of free exercise of conscience protected under the law. Thus, this religious exemption infringes the rights of individuals to act according to the dictates of their faith.

We appreciate the subcommittee's time and consideration of our statement.



Reverend Dr. Carlton W. Veazey
President and CEO, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice