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Missouri Senator Seeks to Halt Federal Mandate Requiring Health Coverage for Contraceptives, Abortion Drugs

February 2, 2012, JEFFERSON CITY, MO – The Missouri Senate is responding swiftly to a new mandate by the Obama Administration that requires religious employers to offer health coverage for contraceptives, sterilization and abortion drugs. Sen. John Lamping (R-St. Louis) filed SB 749 to halt the mandate recently promulgated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The HHS mandate requires all employers, effective Aug. 1, 2012, to provide coverage in their health plans for contraceptives, abortion-inducing emergency contraceptives such as Ella (ulipristal acetate), and sterilization procedures, provision of which the Catholic Church condemns.

The mandate has a limited religious exemption that would protect only those Catholic institutions that seek to inculcate Catholic values, and which “primarily” employ and serve Catholics. Thus at a minimum, Catholic hospitals, universities and charity organizations that serve non-Catholics would not qualify for the exemption.

The legislation states that no employer or health plan shall be required to provide health coverage for abortion, contraception or sterilization if such items are contrary to the religious beliefs or moral convictions of the employer.

The bill also would prevent the government from discriminating against or penalizing an employer or health plan for refusing to provide such coverage. Under the bill, individuals could not be forced to purchase health plans that include coverage for abortion, contraception or sterilization if such items violate their religious or moral beliefs.

“The Obama Administration has decided that virtually unfettered access to contraceptives, abortion-inducing emergency contraceptives and sterilization is more important than the religious liberty of Americans and people of faith,” said Mike Hoey, executive director of the Missouri Catholic Conference. “We applaud Sen. Lamping for bringing this matter before the Missouri General Assembly for debate and consideration.”

Sen. Lamping commented, “I want to send a message to Washington that the people of Missouri will not stand for this intrusion on religious liberty.”

“Catholic hospitals and Catholic Charities provide services for millions of non-Catholics in the U.S., and they do not discriminate against those of other faiths when they decide whom to treat and to serve,” said Hoey.

Co-sponsoring SB 749 are Sen. Scott Rupp (R-Wentzville), Sen. Ron Richard (R-Joplin) and Sen. Mike Kehoe (R-Jefferson City).

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