



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS WELCOMES NEW FEDERAL POLICIES

ST. LOUIS – The Archdiocese of St. Louis welcomes the new federal policies issued by the Trump administration last week which have broad implications for religious liberty.

In one announcement, the Trump administration expanded exemptions to the HHS mandate requiring health insurance coverage of sterilization, contraception, and drugs and devices that may cause abortions. Under the interim regulations which will become permanent in 90 days, churches and their integrated agencies, nonprofits, for profits, and any other non-governmental employer may not be compelled, over their objection based on sincerely held religious beliefs, to provide contraceptive services as part of their employer health insurance plans. The government found that there is no compelling interest in forcing employers to provide contraceptive services against their objections on religious grounds.

Separately, a memo from Attorney General Jeff Sessions set forth 20 principles all federal agencies are to employ in order to protect religious liberty to the fullest extent. Among the provisions outlined in the memo, Attorney General Sessions explains that school vouchers may not be denied based on the fact that a school is religious, that religious employers are free to hire only those of the same religion or who hold to the same precepts, that the government may not interfere with the autonomy of a religious organization, and that the federal government may not withhold grants or contracts based on the relinquishment of a religious organizations hiring exemptions, beliefs, or tenets.

“These new policies are a welcome relief after years of uncertainty,” Archbishop Robert J. Carlson said. “We are grateful that the current administration has made the protection of our religious liberty a priority. I echo the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in my belief that the new policies are not so much innovative as they are a ‘return to common sense, long-standing federal practice, and peaceful coexistence between church and state.’ My hope and prayer is that we may now be vigilant in the defense of these protections should they be threatened again in the future.”

Catholics are encouraged to comment on the interim HHS contraceptive mandate changes until December 5th when they become permanent.

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