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President Obama Stands Strong for Contraceptive Coverage Requirement

Under intense pressure from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, President Obama today said that the White House would not back down from its guarantee that insurance companies must cover contraception without co-pays. Instead, the President announced that it would adjust the policy so that women who work for religiously-affiliated employers like Catholic hospitals can receive contraceptive coverage at no additional cost directly from their insurance companies, rather than from their employers.

“Women asked the President to stand with us, and he did,” said Cynthia Pearson, co-founder of Raising Women’s Voices for the Health Care We Need. “This policy protects women’s access to critical preventive health services without adding new charges.”

While the policy already included an exemption for churches and houses of worship, Catholic hospitals and other religiously affiliated employers have lobbied for more. The Bishops have made clear that they will oppose any policy that gives women insurance coverage for contraception, but Sister Carol Keehan, President of the Catholic Health Association, has been quoted in news reports saying that she supports the policy described today by the President. Keehan is also a supporter of the overarching health reform law, the Affordable Care Act, and her support was critical to Congressional passage of the law in 2010, despite the bishops’ objections.

“Raising Women’s Voices for the Health Care We Need thanks the President for standing strong in defense of women,” Pearson said. “We will be watching closely as insurance companies put the policy into practice to make sure that women get the comprehensive contraceptive coverage that we need, regardless of where we work.”

Pearson also had a message for members of Congress who are considering legislation that would overturn the policy: “Public support for requiring insurance companies to cover basic women’s preventive health care, including contraception, is strong. We urge you stand with women, as the President has done, in defense of access to preventive health care without additional costs.”

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