

# National Organization for Women



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November 29, 2011

## AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write to you on behalf of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the millions of women who need access to affordable birth control and will be eligible for health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act. As the Department of Health and Human Services finalizes regulations for implementation of women's preventive services under the new law, I am alarmed by the full court press on your administration being mounted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and other opponents of contraception. Most worrisome is the self-satisfied comment of Archbishop Timothy Dolan, who, after meeting privately with you last week, is reported to have "found the president of the United States to be very open to the sensitivities of the Catholic community."

But the fact is that the archbishop's notion of the Catholic community's "sensitivities" is wildly out of step with most Catholic women. In this country, about 99 percent of sexually-experienced people have used birth control, including Catholic women at 98 percent. A recent Hart Research Survey indicated that, "Americans, including Catholic Americans, resoundingly support the women's preventative coverage benefit. 71 percent of voters, including 77 percent of Catholic women voters, in fact, support the requirement that health plans cover contraception at no-cost."

Even if this inconvenient truth were otherwise, the USCCB has no business trying to force its extremist ideology on the women of the United States. Birth control is not only universally used in this country, it is a fundamental and constitutionally-protected right that no one -- neither religious zealots nor politicians nor government agencies -- may legitimately infringe. The bishops may wish you to use your presidential power to block women's access to needed health care, but I urge you to do what is right.

Regrettably, HHS regulations already include a sweeping refusal clause allowing a broad swath of religious organizations to withhold coverage for needed contraception from their women employees. This clause should be eliminated, not expanded. It endangers the health and well-being of many women and their families, especially those with low to moderate incomes. For millions of women, contraception is crucial to family planning, allowing fewer unplanned

pregnancies by letting women decide if and when they want to start a family and to appropriately space pregnancies.

Moreover, there is nothing in the HHS regulations requiring organizations to dispense birth control, or an individual to take it. The regulations merely require employers to provide insurance coverage for contraception with no co-payment, just as they do a host of other preventive measures like mammograms, cervical cancer screenings and the like.

The thousands of women who work for Catholic and other religious and quasi-religious institutions, no less than other women, deserve access to affordable health insurance coverage of birth control. Your administration should not override the sound medical advice from the Institute of Medicine about the reproductive health care needs of millions of women at the behest of religious extremists -- and let's be clear: When it comes to women's reproductive health care needs, the USCCB is out of touch and out of bounds.

On behalf of the National Organization for Women, I hope you continue to prioritize women's issues and firmly urge you to reject any and all refusal clauses and to approve final regulations that unconditionally support the full range of reproductive health care services for the women of this nation. As you are aware, it is educated women who have provided crucial support to your presidency and who have welcomed your singular effort to expand access to health insurance coverage -- please do not let them down.

With best regards,



Terry O'Neill