



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Bishop Responds to President Obama's Proposal Regarding HHS Mandate

(HOLLIDAYSBURG, PA) – The Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak, Bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, issued the following statement in response to President Obama's proposed changes to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services mandate that religious employers provide contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs as part of their health insurance plans.

“I have read President Obama's proposal. I am still concerned that it may not be a true compromise in so far as it indicates on face value that the government still intends to usurp the rights of individuals to make decisions that pertain to freedom of conscience. Even though the statement from the President indicates the Church would not be forced to provide or pay for contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs, it appears that the proposal intends to force insurance companies to provide that coverage. Thus, the Church would be compelled indirectly to pay for that coverage because like any other health care consumer, we have to pay insurance premiums. There is no such thing as free insurance. I cannot agree to pay for or support contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs even if I am not paying for them directly. I agree with the statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that this proposal from President Obama requires further study. I also agree that I need to reserve final judgment until we know exactly what the proposal made by the President really means.”