

New York court says insurance must cover contraception: Catholic organizations express disappointment

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Catholic Charities and other religious organizations must provide insurance that pays for prescription contraception, New York's highest court has ruled.

The decision by the state Court of Appeals upholds a January ruling by the appellate division of the state Supreme Court. The judges rejected religious groups' arguments that the 2002 Women's Health and Wellness Act violates religious freedom.

Ten religious organizations sued the state in December 2002, claiming that the law requiring health insurers to provide coverage for obstetric and gynecologic care should include a religious exemption for organizations that do not support birth control. The ten groups were seeking to broaden a "religious employer" exemption to include church-related schools and social-service organizations.

The New York State Catholic Conference expressed disappointment with the decision. "Any religious organization must have the right in American society to uphold its own teachings," the conference said. It contended that the October 19 ruling opens the way for legislation that would force Catholic entities to pay for employees' abortions.

The ruling reinforces the intention of the women's health legislation, said Betty DeFazio, speaking for Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region. "Birth control for women is basic health care." *-Religion News Service*