

Evangelicals side with Catholics on insurance mandate

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Catholics who have pushed back against a White House policy that would require many religious insurers to cover contraception are getting a high-profile assist from dozens of evangelical leaders.

"We write in solidarity, but separately -- to stress that religious organizations and leaders of other faiths are also deeply troubled by and opposed to the mandate and the narrow exemption," the leaders wrote Wednesday (Dec. 21) in a letter to President Obama.

Like Catholic officials, the evangelicals object to a mandate under the health care reform law that would require employers to offer insurance coverage for contraception to employees, including treatments that some equate with abortions.

"It is not only Catholics who object to the narrow exemption that protects only seminaries and a few churches, but not churches with a social outreach and other faith-based organizations that serve the poor and needy," they wrote.

Signatories include National Association of Evangelicals President Leith Anderson; Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land; Focus on the Family Senior Vice President Tom Minnery; and Stanley Carlson-Thies, president of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance.

The letter to Obama was sent the same day that evangelical Colorado Christian University joined Belmont Abbey College, a Catholic school, in suing the Department of Health and Human Services over the rule, which is scheduled to take effect in August.

An HHS official said the department is reviewing public comments on the proposed religious exemption on contraceptives.

The head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, voiced his concerns to Obama in a meeting, and said the president promised to "look long and hard" at the issue.