

White House expands birth control exemptions for employers, schools

The new rules extend to institutions with religious or moral objections to providing insurance that covers contraception—but not to publicly traded businesses, government agencies, or government-funded health centers.

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [December 5, 2018](#) issue

The Trump administration issued new rules it sees as “conscience protections for Americans who have a religious or moral objection to health insurance that covers contraception methods.”

The Health and Human Services, Labor, and Treasury Departments had released interim regulations last year for employers and educational institutions who did not want to pay for health insurance that includes birth control.

The finalized rules counter the efforts by the Obama administration to provide access to free contraception through a provision of the Affordable Care Act.

“The first of today’s final rules provides an exemption from the contraceptive coverage mandate to entities that object to services covered by the mandate on the basis of sincerely held religious beliefs,” HHS said in a news release November 7. “The second final rule provides protections to nonprofit organizations and small businesses that have nonreligious moral convictions opposing services covered by the mandate.”

The new rules do not provide exemptions for publicly traded businesses, government agencies, or government programs that provide subsidized or free contraceptive coverage to poor women, such as through community health centers.

The departments making the announcement estimated that the exemptions will affect 200 employers and 6,400 women. The announcement noted that tens of

millions of people are already exempted from the contraception mandate because it does not apply to plans that existed prior to the law.

The mother provincial of Little Sisters of the Poor, one of the religious groups that opposed the mandate, welcomed the administration's new regulations.

"We pray that lawsuits by state governments . . . will soon be over and we can finally serve the elderly poor in peace," said Loraine Marie Maguire, as quoted on social media by Becket, the law firm representing the sisters.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State said the administration's actions deny more than contraception coverage.

"This administration is weaponizing 'religious freedom' to justify hurting the millions of women who depend on contraception for their health and equality," said Rachel Laser, president and CEO. "Bosses shouldn't get to impose their religious beliefs on their employees, nor should universities on their students." —Religion News Service

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