

**September 28, 2011**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today sent a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Kathleen Sebelius, regarding a recently proposed regulation related to coverage of contraceptive drugs, a mandate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Beginning in August 2012, group health plans will be required to cover the cost for all drugs approved for contraception. An exemption exists within the new regulation for a "religious employer," but the definition of those organizations is narrow, and could ultimately force religiously-affiliated organizations to restrict or end their community services. In his letter, Congressman Altmire requested that HHS reconsider the definition in the new regulation to protect important services that religiously-affiliated institutions provide.

"By placing a burdensome regulation on organizations that morally object to its purpose, we threaten the services that religious organizations provide to our communities," Congressman Altmire said. "If this regulation stays intact, religiously-affiliated organizations could be forced to serve only those individuals that share their views or stop serving all together. I strongly urge Secretary Sebelius to take another look at this proposed guidance and consider the impact it could have on important community programs."

The full text of Congressman Altmire's letter is pasted below:

September 27, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius

Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave., SW

Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I write to you with regard to recently proposed regulatory guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) related to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act's requirement that group health plans cover all drugs approved for contraception and ask that HHS reconsider the proposed guidance. Specifically, I am concerned that the definition of "religious employer" within the conscience exemption is too narrow, and may have a negative impact on the charitable services many religiously-affiliated organizations provide to communities across the country.

As currently written, the exemption would not apply to religious institutions where non-affiliated individuals are employed, the direct instruction of religious beliefs is not the primary purpose, or the individuals served by the institution do not share the institution's religious tenets. An unintended consequence of this narrowly tailored exemption could be that religiously-affiliated organizations, hospitals, universities, colleges, and social service agencies could stop providing services to the communities they currently serve, regardless of religious affiliation, so that they can fall within the definition of a "religious employer." Without any change to the definition, it is a very real possibility that these institutions could restrict their hiring and services to only those individuals who share their affiliation. As a result, religiously-affiliated hospitals could decide to serve only patients that share their religious tenets, turning away a great number of people in need of medical care, and churches of all denominations may cease their community services.

I respectfully request that HHS reconsider the "religious employer" definition in the proposed guidance. A broader definition would protect the important services that religiously-affiliated institutions provide to our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter. I look forward to working with you and your staff to craft guidance that strikes the appropriate balance.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jason Altmire