

US BISHOPS: DOCTORS HAVE RIGHT TO SAY NO TO ABORTION

Support Protection for Conscientious Objectors

WASHINGTON, D.C. AUG. 22, 2008 (Zenit.org). - A U.S. bishops' aide welcomed a draft of federal regulations aimed to beef up existing legislation protecting health care providers' right to conscientiously object to participating in abortions.

Secretary Michael Leavitt of the Department of Health and Human Services released the regulations Thursday for a 30-day public comment period.

Deirdre McQuade, a spokeswoman for the bishops on life issues, welcomed the proposed regulations as a way to protect medical personnel from being coerced to violate their consciences in federally funded programs.

"Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel face pressure to participate in abortion -- a practice that many find abhorrent in good conscience," McQuade said. "The enforcement of federal laws designed to protect their freedom of conscience is long overdue."

The regulations would make federal funding dependent on an organization's willingness not to discriminate against health care professionals who object to participating in abortions.

"This is not just about Catholic health care," McQuade continued. "Catholics do not stand alone in opposition to the deliberate destruction of nascent human life. All health care providers should be free to serve their patients without violating their most deeply held moral and religious convictions on the value of life."

"Organizations calling themselves 'pro-choice' are actually pro-coercion in seeking to deny the freedom of doctors and nurses," the spokeswoman affirmed. "Don't doctors have the right to choose not to participate?"

"Over the coming 30 days of public comment, the bishops urge the pro-life American public to thank Secretary Leavitt and encourage HHS to implement the strongest possible regulations."

The proposed regulations were leaked to the press earlier this summer, prompting Cardinal Justin Rigali, chair of the bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, to write members of Congress urging them to support the measures.