



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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Bioethics and Public Policy Report

April 2015

The National Scene

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation known as the 21st Century Womens Health Act, which would require hospitals to administer potential abortifacient [to survivors of rape](#). ♦ Congress is considering a bill to force agencies, who assist women who are victims of sex trafficking, to provide referrals for abortion, in violation of the religious freedom of [faith-sponsored agencies](#). ♦ The U.S. Department of Labor has modified its regulations to redefine spouse to cover all same-sex marriages. Thus, the Family and Medical Leave Act now requires employers to grant leave to employees to care for a same-sex spouse, even though the state of the employer does not [recognize same-sex marriage](#). ♦ The U.S. Congress is considering the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (H.R. 940), which would [add a conscience clause](#) to the Affordable Care Act, and strengthen the Weldon Amendment that forbids government-funded agencies from discriminating against those who decline to take part in abortion or abortion coverage.

The State of Conscience and Religious Liberty

The Governor of Indiana signed into law an act weakening the religious freedom secured by the state's initial Religious Freedom Restoration Act. ♦ The District of Columbia City Council has passed two laws that patently [violate religious liberty](#): the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act (RHNDAA), and the Human Rights Amendment Act (HRAA). These laws force religious groups to hire or provide resources to people who do not respect their mission. The U.S. Congress has constitutional authority to review and disapprove legislation passed by the DC Council, but only within 30 days. Please call the Capitol Switchboard: 1-202-224-3121, and state your opposition to your Congressperson. ♦ The petition of Pennsylvania's Geneva College, and the dioceses of Erie and Pittsburgh, to the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit [to hear a challenge](#) to its three-judge panel's ruling that would force the Christian school to [provide access to abortifacients](#) under the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Contraceptive Mandate, was denied. However, the U.S. Supreme Court [issued an injunction](#) against the order while the case proceeds judicially. ♦ The Georgia Senate [approved a bill](#) to protect religious freedom which would forbid state government from infringing on a person's religious beliefs unless the government can prove it has a compelling interest. Its status is pending. ♦ The American Civil Liberties Union is [filing a federal lawsuit](#) to attempt to violate the religious freedom of agencies serving refugees, stating that these agencies must secure availability of contraception and abortion. ♦ The North Carolina Legislature is considering a proposal to provide conscience protection for magistrates who do not want to witness same-sex marriages. Two former North Carolina magistrates have [filed a lawsuit](#) claiming that they were forced to quit their jobs because court administrators ordered them to perform same-sex weddings. ♦ The Florida Legislature is [considering a bill](#) to provide conscience protection to adoption agencies, after a court ruled that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to be adopting parents. A similar bill is advancing in the [Michigan Legislature](#), as well as in the [Alabama Legislature](#). ♦ The Louisiana Legislature is considering a proposal to provide [conscience protection to business owners](#) who do not want to condone a same-sex marriage ceremony by being forced to provide items needed for the event. ♦ The Archdiocese of San Francisco has issued a Statement of the High Schools of the Archdiocese of San Francisco Regarding the Teachings and Practice of the Catholic Church, [reviewing the responsibilities of teachers](#) in relationship to Catholic doctrine. ♦ The New Jersey Legislature is considering a proposal under a "Law against Discrimination" to force employers to provide workers with a health benefit plan that includes [all forms of contraception](#). A similar proposal is before the [Minnesota Legislature](#). ♦ The U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals [rejected a challenge](#) to New Jersey's ban on therapy aimed at treating the sexual orientation of minors, finding that parents don't have a fundamental right to any type of treatment for their children.

The State of Marriage

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has submitted an amicus brief in support of a case before the U.S. Supreme Court asserting states' rights to define marriage as between [one man and one woman](#). ♦ An Alabama judge has [granted a divorce](#) to a lesbian couple married in another state. ♦ The U.S. First Circuit Court of Appeals is [hearing a challenge](#) to Puerto Rico's ban on same-sex marriage. ♦ The Arizona Supreme Court Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee has issued an opinion requiring [judges who officiate at weddings](#) to do so for same-sex marriages. ♦ Also visit the [NCBC web page](#) for the updated list of states' Status of Marriage:

State by State

The Oregon Legislature is consider a proposal to expand the period of [anticipated death](#), in their law allowing physician assisted suicide, from six months to twelve months. ♦ The Montana Senate failed to pass a bill approved by the House of Representatives criminalizing physician-assisted suicide. The Montana Supreme Court had ruled in 2010 that a physician [would not be penalized](#) in assisting a person to die. ♦ Proposals to legalize physician assisted suicide are still before the following Legislatures: AK, PA, CA, MN, NY, MT, WI, NC, NJ, MA, RI, and DC. ♦ Vermont's Legislature is considering the necessity of [retaining the minimum safeguards](#) in their assisted suicide statute, which will sunset in 2016. ♦ A bill is before the Alabama Legislature to [ban physician-assisted suicide](#) as a Class C felony. ♦ The Ohio Legislature is considering a proposal to [ban abortions after twenty weeks gestation](#), when fetal pain is experienced. A similar proposal is advancing in the New Mexico Legislature. ♦ The Michigan Legislature is advancing a bill to provide "[Choose Life](#)" license plates, the revenue from which will help fund abortion alternatives. ♦ The Minnesota Legislature is advancing a bill to [prohibit taxpayer funding](#) of abortion. ♦ The Arkansas Legislature is advancing a bill to [prohibit taxpayer funding](#) of Planned Parenthood. ♦ A proposal to [ban abortions after 20 weeks](#) of fetal development is progressing in the South Carolina Legislature. ♦ A bill to ban sex-selection abortions [failed in the Colorado Legislature](#). ♦ A bill to [prevent public funding of Planned Parenthood](#) failed to pass in the New Hampshire Legislature. ♦ A proposal to require a [48-hour waiting period](#), and information to enhance informed consent before an abortion, has advanced in the Tennessee Legislature. ♦ A bill is before the Alaska Legislature which would provide for [parental rights over sex education](#) taught to their children, as well as prohibiting materials produced by abortion providers to be used in public school sex education programs. ♦ The North Carolina Legislature is considering a proposal to allow local school districts to [determine the type of sex education](#) presented to their children. That state also is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review a lower court decision overturning a law which requires a doctor to [provide a woman seeking an abortion](#) an ultrasound of her unborn child's development. ♦ The Minnesota Catholic Conference is supporting a proposal to establish a [Legislative Surrogacy Commission](#) in Minnesota to take a serious, in-depth look at the many concerns associated with surrogacy arrangements.

Recent Good News

The U.S. Supreme Court ordered the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals to reconsider its ruling that requires the University of Notre Dame, through its insurance plans, to [provide contraception to its students](#) and employees. ♦ The Utah Legislature has tabled a proposal to [legalize physician-assisted suicide](#), and established a mechanism to study the matter. The same initiative [failed in the Legislatures](#) of: CO, CT, MD, NV, UT, and WY. ♦ The West Virginia Legislature has voted to [override the Governor's veto](#) of a ban on abortions after twenty weeks gestation. ♦ The Kansas Governor has signed into law a [ban on dismembering abortion](#), often used in the second trimester of pregnancy. ♦ The Governor of Arizona signed into law a provision to [assure informed consent](#) for women seeking chemical abortions, requiring they be informed of the availability of medications to reverse the effects of such chemicals. The new law also restricts healthcare plans made available through the publically funded exchanges of the Affordable Care Act from including abortion coverage. ♦ The Governor of Oklahoma has [signed into law](#) the "Oklahoma Unborn Child Protection from Dismemberment Abortion Act."

Sharing Your Good News and Your Efforts

If there are public policy advocacy strategies which you wish to share with others, please e-mail mhilliard@ncbcenter.org.

Sharing of Resources

The web page of the National Catholic Bioethics Center is a significant resource in the realm of bioethics: www.ncbcenter.org. Also, bioethicists are on call twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week, for consultation by calling 215-877-2660.