

CATHOLIC HOSPITALS UNDER FIRE IN CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut legislature's Public Health Committee is considering a bill that would require all hospitals in the state, including four Roman Catholic ones, to provide emergency contraception to rape victims. The Connecticut Catholic Conference asked for a religious exemption for Catholic hospitals, and it was seconded by the Catholic League.

William Donohue wrote the following letter on March 2 to members of the Public Health Committee asking them to accede to the Catholic Conference's request:

Dear Connecticut Lawmaker:

Requiring Roman Catholic hospitals to abide by state strictures on the distribution of emergency contraception ineluctably violates both the religious liberty provision of the First Amendment and the establishment provision, and that is why I am urging you to reject such an appeal.

A Catholic institution cannot be considered Catholic if it is mandated to yield its religious prerogatives to the state. It is only just that the time-honored exemption afforded religious institutions in matters like this be affirmed. Not to do so sets up a judicial battle that will drain the resources of both sides, the likely outcome of which will be to respect the First Amendment right of Catholic hospitals to maintain their autonomy.

Finally, there is no evidence that the current practice of having Catholic hospitals make referrals to other hospitals isn't working. In other words, on the basis of legal, religious, moral and practical grounds, the case to provide an

exemption to Catholic hospitals is decisive.

On March 6, Connecticut's state victim advocate, James Papillo, told the state legislature's Public Health Committee that it was anti-Catholic to force Catholic hospitals to give rape victims emergency contraception. The next day, Lt. Gov. Kevin Sullivan called for Papillo to resign: he accused Papillo, a Catholic deacon, of abusing his office. Papillo refused to do so.

We wasted no time weighing in on Papillo's side. Here is our news release on this subject:

"Lt. Gov. Sullivan is overreaching. If he doesn't like James Papillo's position, so be it. But who is he to tell an appointed official to resign simply because of a partisan squabble? Sullivan's outburst shows contempt for freedom of speech and the democratic process. Does he really think that appointed officials need to clear their remarks with him before they speak? Sullivan could benefit from a course in Civics 101.

"Papillo is correct to say that 'What's being proposed here is a solution in search of a problem.' As he instructs, the four Catholic hospitals in Connecticut routinely refer rape victims to other hospitals if they think the woman is pregnant and wants emergency contraception. 'Victims are not being denied services,' Papillo rightly observes.

"Perhaps Sullivan is unaware of the fact that an innocent unborn child who is at risk—at risk of having his or her life intentionally terminated—is precisely the kind of person that a state's victim advocate should defend. Looks like he needs a course in Bio 101 as well."

Anti-Catholic attacks like this are frequently being launched by Catholics themselves. That doesn't make them any less objectionable. Indeed, such outbursts are all the more offensive coming as they are from those who profess to be

Catholic.

If Catholic hospitals have to stop being Catholic in order to survive, they should close.