

HHS FINAL RULES

The Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate forcing Catholic non-profits to pay for abortion-inducing drugs, contraception and sterilization will not kick in on August 1, as scheduled; an extension has been granted to January 1, 2014. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' initial reaction was cautious; a complete analysis of the final rules is forthcoming.

There are some changes in the rules worth noting, but they are not satisfactory. Attempts to distance Catholic non-profits from directly providing insurance coverage for these morally objectionable services are admirable, but we've been there before: five months ago we were told that more in the way of accommodation was forthcoming, and we applauded that gesture. But now we know that the Obama administration has come up short.

There were some encouraging signs in late June: in two separate rulings, the courts sided with business owners who challenged the enforcement of the HHS mandate. One was a circuit court of appeals ruling in Denver, and the other was a federal district case in Florida. In both cases, Hobby Lobby and Beckwith Electric, respectively, the rulings were decisive.

The Catholic community, and many others, are not asking for anything new: all we are asking for is to respect the status quo ante as it applies to this issue. It is not people of faith who sought this confrontation—it is President Obama. No matter, it is likely the Supreme Court will eventually decide this issue.