

NEW YORK STATE BILL THREATENS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

On Monday, the New York State Assembly passed a bill that would require all employers to provide contraceptive health insurance coverage for its employees. The Assembly explicitly rejected a religious conscience protection clause, which was found acceptable to the New York State Senate. A compromise measure will now be sought.

The New York State Catholic Bishops oppose any bill that does not allow Catholic health care facilities and health maintenance organizations the right to opt out of any mandated contraceptive and infertility coverage. Catholic League president William Donohue defended the position of the bishops today:

“Any bill which forces religious organizations to relinquish their doctrinal prerogatives and institutional autonomy is an expression of intolerance. The diversity that marks our nation’s religious institutions is one of our most treasured assets, and that is why attempts to impose a secular agenda—via the heavy hand of the state—is strikingly un-American. Separation of church and state cuts both ways: just as it is wrong for a religious institution to strong-arm state agencies to bow to religious precepts, it is wrong for the state to coerce religious institutions to accept programs that effectively vitiate their *raison d’être*.

“Forty-six states currently have waivers for employers or insurers based on religious objections, and New York is one of the forty-six. There is absolutely no grassroots support for any initiative that would upset the status quo, making unintelligible the enthusiasm some legislators have for this Assembly bill. Most troubling of all is a remark by Sheldon Silver, the Assembly Speaker, who said that a religious

conscience exemption would be 'taking religious freedom a little too far.' Silver needs to explain to Roman Catholics why he thinks their rights are being pushed too far (after all, whose freedoms was he thinking of?). Though he may not have meant it that way, such language strikes us as being downright anti-Catholic."