



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ISN'T RED OR BLUE. IT'S AMERICAN.

Democrats and Republicans fight about every issue, but on religious freedom - our first American freedom - there should be no argument. In America, religious belief and practice are protected by the First Amendment.

As Catholics, we serve the poor, protect life, welcome immigrants, educate youth, and fight for social justice. Our service flows directly from our faith; the two cannot be separated. These are matters of conscience and principle, not subjects for political negotiation or compromise. But today, the right to live out our faith is being eroded.

At the federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services recently decided that Catholic schools, charities and hospitals are not "religious employers" that deserve religious freedom protection. As a result, these ministries will be forced to provide and pay for health insurance coverage of sterilization and contraception—including abortion-inducing drugs - forcing them to choose between violating Church teaching and breaking the law. In some states, legislation has passed that would prevent Catholics from serving undocumented immigrants, even with basics like food, shelter and medical services. In both cases, religious people and institutions, both Catholic and non-Catholic, have stood up for the freedom of all Americans by challenging these violations of conscience in court.

Whenever government tries to redefine any faith community by severing religious service from religious worship, or tries to force those service providers to violate their consciences, that's dangerous for all Americans, not just Catholics. For nearly forty years, both political parties have backed federal laws that protect conscience rights. Religious freedom has never been red or blue, left or right, Catholic or non-Catholic. It's American. Let's keep it that way.

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