



National Gay and Lesbian  
**Task Force**



December 1, 2011

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Religious Exemptions in Women's Health Amendment Rule

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and National Center for Transgender Equality, we write this letter to encourage you not to expand the religious exemptions for health providers to deny health care services and supplies to women based on religious refusal policies initiated under the Bush administration. We applaud the recent announcement that Qualified Health Plans under the Affordable Care Act must provide contraception to women as preventive health services with no co-pay, but are concerned about recent reports that the Administration is considering carving out a religious-based exemption to this important provision.

As advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, we know the damage that religious refusal policies can cause public health programs. So-called "conscience clauses" privilege private beliefs over evidence-based best practices in public health, allowing providers to pick and choose the prevention, treatment, care and support services they wish to offer people based on their own beliefs instead of proven methods. Enacting such clauses eliminates safe guards that should ensure any population, particularly those who are most vulnerable, get the services they need. Indeed, it is *typically* the most vulnerable whose access to services are denied – such as the LGBT community in PEPFAR programs. A broad religious refusal exemption for preventive health care would erode public health and set a dangerous precedent.

We therefore urge your administration to reject any broadening of the religious exemption, which would deny women access to contraceptives, a key component in promoting women's optimum health.

Sincerely,

Mara Keisling  
Executive Director  
NCTE

Rea Carey  
Executive Director  
NGLTF

Shannon Minter  
Legal Director  
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