

Abortion Non-Discrimination Act

For years the Catholic Church and others have asked Congress to reform current federal laws on conscience rights, especially to protect individual and institutional health care providers who object to abortion. Current laws like the Weldon amendment are legally vulnerable and seldom enforced; they have been found to have loopholes limiting their effectiveness, and they lack a "right of action" allowing victims of discrimination to defend their rights in court. For many years the Church has proposed a way to address these challenges head-on: the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act (ANDA).

Recently ANDA has been combined with provisions on the HHS contraceptive mandate to create the "Health Care Conscience Rights Act" (HCCRA) (HR 940, S. 1919). HCCRA is now part of the House of Representatives' Labor/HHS appropriations bill for the coming year. HCCRA has strong support in the House, but its provisions on contraception have been strongly opposed in the Senate and by the White House. The Supreme Court has also partly addressed the HHS mandate in its Hobby Lobby case, and takes up seven new cases about it in its new term.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops have decided to focus at present on ANDA. Americans' right to object to involvement in abortion has long enjoyed broad support, and President Obama has said several times that he supports federal laws protecting this right. Some two dozen pro-life groups, religious and secular, wrote jointly to Congressional leadership to say that they support a number of other pro-life bills, but they all agree that ANDA is a top priority, the one proposal with a decent chance of being enacted this year as part of that spending legislation. Catholic lay groups such as the Knights of Columbus and National Council of Catholic Women have offered their help. Right now, however, we need as many Catholics as possible around the country to send email messages to their elected representatives urging them to make ANDA part of that final legislation. Fortunately, the USCCB has provided two user-friendly items to help you in spreading the word about this bill to the people of your parish and school communities. They are: The "Stand with Cathy for Conscience Rights" video on YouTube [<https://youtu.be/uknrxrMI61WI>] <https://youtu.be/uknrxrMI61WI>. This video features nurse Cathy DeCarlo, who was forced by her employer to assist at a late-term abortion – then found she had no right to go to court to keep this from happening to others. The link points people to the USCCB page, [<http://www.usccb.org/conscience>] www.usccb.org/conscience for more information and an alert. The link can be shared on Facebook and embedded into web pages. The NCHLA Alert Making it Easy to Send Emails to Congress [<http://www.nchla.org/actiondisplay.asp?ID=292>] <http://www.nchla.org/actiondisplay.asp?ID=292>

The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA), USCCB's partner organization mobilizing grassroots support for the Bishops' pro-life agenda, has an alert to help constituents write to their elected representatives. There is a pre-written text but each person can add personal messages before and after it – for example, pro-life health professionals can say how they have experienced or witnessed threats to conscience rights on abortion. Live links to this can be shared on web sites and social media; the PDF version can be inserted into Church bulletins and diocesan publications.

Please disseminate this information as widely as possible in the coming weeks to your parish and school communities, and encourage all to lend their voice to this effort to secure conscience rights for healthcare workers.