



*Seeking Justice with the Love of God*

February 29, 2012

Dear Senator:

Long dedicated to the defense of religious liberty, the Christian Legal Society urges bipartisan support for The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, in order to restore our nation's most essential freedom to its rightful primacy in national policy. Throughout its fifty year history, CLS has seen no more direct affront to religious liberty than the Administration's regulatory requirement that religious institutions provide insurance coverage that contravenes their core religious beliefs.

The regulations' curious "religious exemption" -- curious because almost no religious institution is protected -- is a sham. Faith-based institutions are covered *only* if they *serve only members of their faith*. No hospitals, homeless shelters, or international aid groups need apply. Indeed, churches lose the exemption if they help anyone outside their congregations. Thus the regulations harm any community that depends on churches' generosity to help those in need. It strikes a blow to religious citizens' laudatory desire to serve others who do not share the same religious beliefs.

In alliance with numerous Jewish and Protestant organizations, CLS twice petitioned the President to re-think this potent restriction on traditional religious liberty. Rebuffing those requests, the Administration instead reiterated that religious groups must fall in line or suffer the consequences. To add insult to injury, the Administration delayed the compliance deadline a year -- until after the election -- as if a year of soul-searching will persuade religious groups to recant.

Why does the Administration even purport to offer a religious exemption? Either no religious conscience issue exists, and everyone must march in lockstep, or a religious conscience issue exists, and the government must provide a good-faith exemption. Instead, the Administration takes the worst path imaginable: it recognizes that a significant conscience issue exists, but then effectively precludes a religious organization that seeks to serve others from preserving conscience rights among its own staff.

This issue crosses religious, gender, and political lines to strike at the heart of American pluralism. By passing The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, Congress will protect religious institutions from the Administration's redefinition of "religion" -- a redefinition so miserly that, in the end, no religion is protected. America deserves better.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred L. Potter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "F".

Fred L. Potter  
Executive Director and CEO