

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

September 28, 2010

Ms. Doreen E. Beebe
Washington State Board of Pharmacy
P.O. Box 47863,
Olympia, Washington 98504-7863

Dear Ms. Beebe,

I write to you today as the president of Catholics for Choice regarding the possibility of amending Chapter 246-863 WAC Pharmacists - Licensing, and Chapter 246-869 WAC Pharmacy Licensing to allow additional or alternative procedures that will ensure patients have access to medications when they need them. I urge you to oppose any amendments or additions to the existing rules that will create barriers to medically necessary pharmaceuticals including contraceptives and emergency contraception. Allowing changes which add barriers, be they cost or procedural, would put the personal beliefs of a small minority of healthcare providers before the needs of patients—especially those of survivors of a sexual assault.

Washington state citizens include more than 750,000 Catholics. In light of the din of comments you have been receiving on this issue, I want to make you aware that Catholics across the US, and in Washington, support access to contraceptives and overwhelmingly support offering immediate comprehensive and compassionate care to survivors of sexual assault—including dispensing emergency contraception. Catholic women believe that healthcare providers should make a variety of contraceptive methods available and accessible to their patients. Nearly eight in ten (78%) Catholics oppose allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill birth control prescriptions. (Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2008).

Patients, including survivors of sexual assault, should not have to worry about the religious and moral beliefs of those who are working in pharmacies and emergency rooms throughout the state of Washington when they arrive for care. While we recognize the right of individual medical professionals to decline to provide services they consider immoral, we strongly believe proposals that grant blanket exemption to institutions such as Catholic hospitals goes too far. Regardless of what allowances are made for the individual conscience of the provider, institutions should not seek to impose any ideology and should instead defer to the individual conscience of the patient by respecting his or her right to comprehensive care.

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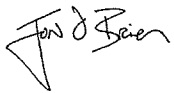
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Within the field of medical ethics, the accepted resolution to a conflict of values is to allow the individual to act on his or her own conscience and for the institution (the hospital, clinic or pharmacy) to serve as the facilitator of all consciences. When an institution rejects this role and instead inserts its own “conscience-based” refusal to provide services, it violates the rights of both patients and health-care providers—who may well consider the services the institution is denying to be profoundly moral and medically necessary—to make conscience-based decisions.

Enclosed with this letter, please find our pamphlet, *In Good Conscience: Respecting the Beliefs of Health-Care Providers and the Needs of Patients*. This publication details the history of conscience clauses, outlines Catholic teaching on conscience and medical ethics and proposes a Catholic approach to conscience clause legislation. If Catholics for Choice can provide you with any further information on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Domestic Program, Sara Hutchinson, at shutchinson@catholicsforchoice.org or by phone at 202-986-6093.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jon O'Brien
President