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Mich. Catholic Conference 'pleased' injunction granted on contraception mandate

KIM KOZLOWSKI THE DETROIT NEWS

The Michigan Catholic Conference hopes a federal court injunction this week could lead to the church being exempt from the Affordable Care Act's mandated contraception coverage in health insurance policies.

A three-judge panel of the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals this week granted a temporary injunction against the federal law that requires the Catholic Conference to provide birth control coverage to more than 10,000 of its employees by Wednesday or risk steep fines.

The church is morally opposed to the federal health law's insurance mandate that includes contraception, sterilization and drugs the church views as inducing an abortion such as the morning-after pill.

The panel handed down the temporary injunction Tuesday, and it will be in effect until arguments can be heard by the appeals court, likely in February, and a decision is made.

"This is a burdensome mandate that forces Catholic employers to violate their constitutional right to religious liberty," said Dave Maluchnik, spokesman for the Michigan Catholic Conference. "We're pleased the appellate court has acted in our favor."

The injunction came after attorneys sought an emergency injunction before the federal law went into effect. Similar injunctions were issued to Catholic organizations in Washington, D.C.; Tennessee; Indiana; Texas and Pennsylvania, according to attorneys involved in the lawsuits.

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., this week also asked President Barack Obama to exempt religious organizations from fines until legal issues are settled. Failure to provide coverage would result in \$100 a day per employee, or \$36,500 a year per employee.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's Catholic Church, provides health insurance to employees in seven dioceses in the state, along with employees of more than 825 Catholic organizations including charities, schools, cemeteries and homes for the elderly. Their benefits cover 10,500 people and their dependents.

Faith-based organizations have opposed the Affordable Care Act's requirement of contraception coverage, arguing it encroached on their religious freedoms. But supporters countered the requirement provides gender equity in health care coverage.

Earlier this year, the Obama administration created a compromise that tried to separate religious organizations from paying for contraception benefits while still offering them to employees by requiring private insurers to pay for the coverage.

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