

## The Detroit News

---

APRIL 15, 2013

# Editorial: Rights of conscience must be preserved

Lawmakers offer bill to protect health care workers from being forced to violate their moral and religious beliefs

Michigan lawmakers worried that the Obama administration is brushing over concerns that its health care law will trample religious freedoms have crafted an appropriate bill to shield workers and hospitals from being coerced into violating their conscience.

Sen. John Moolenaar, R-Midland, introduced legislation that would offer conscience protections to individuals and institutions in the health care field.

"The HHS mandate brought this to the forefront," Moolenaar says, referring to regulations from the federal Health and Human Services department requiring all insurance plans to provide coverage of abortions and contraceptives. "As a state, we need to protect the religious liberty and conscience of citizens."

The bill recently passed out of the Senate Health Policy Committee and will now be taken up by the full Senate.

And while a state law can't override federal contraceptive dictates, it would prevent similar mandates from occurring at the state level and would protect hospitals and workers from having to engage in activities they object to on moral or religious grounds.

Other states, including Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky, have similar laws, according to the Michigan Catholic Conference, which is backing Moolenaar's bill.

Michigan already has a 30-year-old law on the books allowing health care workers and health care facilities to refuse participating in abortions.

This bill would expand protections to other non-life-threatening, elective services, including selling contraceptives and participating in sterilization procedures.

The legislation would also shield health care providers and institutions from firing, liability or discrimination because of objections to certain services.

But the bill, along with existing federal law, excludes religious objections in life-threatening situations. The bill would also limit objections in parts of Michigan where health care services are limited.

At a time when the White House has decided enacting its health care bill is more important than respecting civil liberties, the state must offer its citizens what protections it can.

