



Evangelical Stalwart Wheaton College Joins Suit Against Contraception Mandate

Wheaton College, an Illinois school considered by many to be the leading higher education institution in the evangelical community, has joined the throng of religious organizations suing to overturn the Obama Administration's contraception mandate. The mandate, part of the "Obamacare" socialized health plan, requires that employers, including non-church religious organizations, provide free contraception — including abortion inducing drugs — with their employee health plans.



Wheaton, which filed the suit in partnership with Washington D.C.-based Catholic University of America (CUA), is being represented by the legal advocacy group [Becket Fund for Religious Liberty](#).

"Wheaton's religious beliefs forbid it from participating in, providing access to, paying for, training others to engage in, or otherwise supporting abortion..." states the suit, filed in federal district court for the District of Columbia. "The government's Mandate unconstitutionally coerces Wheaton to violate its deeply-held religious beliefs under threat of heavy fines and penalties." The suit goes on to state that the federal government "issued an administrative rule ... that runs roughshod over Wheaton's religious beliefs, and the beliefs of millions of other Americans, by forcing it to provide health insurance coverage for abortifacient drugs and related education and counseling."

Kyle Duncan, general counsel for the Becket Fund, said that the Obama-Administration enforced mandate "is not just a Catholic issue — it threatens people of all faiths. Wheaton's historic decision to join the fight alongside a Catholic institution shows the broad consensus that the mandate endangers everyone's religious liberty."

Wheaton College President Dr. Philip Ryken (pictured above) said that his "and other distinctively Christian institutions are faced with a clear and present threat to our religious liberty" because of the mandate. He recalled that the college's first president, the abolitionist Jonathan Blanchard, "believed it was imperative to act in defense of freedom. In bringing this suit, we act in defense of freedom again."

Catholic University of America President John Garvey said of the joint suit his institution filed with the evangelical college: "As the president of the national university of the Catholic Church, I am happy to express solidarity with our evangelical brothers and sisters from Wheaton College as they challenge the HHS mandate. Wheaton's lawsuit is another sign of how troubling many people of faith find the government's efforts to chip away at our first freedom."

Of the partnership Ryken said: "We think this is an appropriate area for evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics to work together. There are lots of things we disagree about, but one of the things we agree about is the fundamental importance of religious liberty." He added that "we thought there was an opportunity in filing alongside a Catholic institution to help all Americans to see there's a fundamental issue at stake here that affects all of us [and that] cuts across a lot of our religious



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 26, 2012

differences.”

The mandate does not apply at this time to churches, and while it is scheduled to go into effect August 1, the Department of Health and Human Services has given non-church religious institutions an additional year to comply with the rule.

[Christianity Today](#) reported that “interfaith leaders from groups such as Wheaton, World Vision, World Relief, and Evangelicals for Social Action sent an Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance letter of ‘grave concern’ to Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius on June 11.” In the letter, reported the evangelical magazine, the group “outlined its concern that the administration narrowly defined a set of religious employers with a different accommodation for non-exempt religious organizations. In other words, a religious employer such as Wheaton College would be under a different set of rules from an evangelical church.

Shapri LoMaglio of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities told *Christianity Today* that the number of religious institutions that have joined to fight the mandate in court “makes clear what a watershed moment it is for religious institutions.” She said that the government’s attempts “to narrow the scope of what is legally recognized as a religious institution sets a dangerous precedent and undermines the character of the institution going forward because their religious identity is vital to who they are. What these lawsuits show is that religious groups do not view the accommodation as adequate.”

Wheaton College is the fourth Protestant institution of higher learning to file suit against the mandate, joining Colorado Christian University, Geneva College, and Louisiana College. In all, more than 50 religious institutions — including Catholic hospitals, schools, and various ministries and outreaches — have filed, to date, 24 lawsuits to overturn the ruling.

For some observers, Wheaton’s participation seems out of keeping with its penchant for steering clear of political and social issues that have attracted more passionate evangelical Christian groups. Over the past decade some conservative Christians have accused Wheaton College of caving in to a liberal social agenda, and even Ryken concedes that the school would rather get along with the federal government than battle it. “We’re reluctant filers of this lawsuit,” he was quoted by CBN News as observing. “We have no real interest in opposing the government.” He added, however, that “we do think we have a responsibility to raise this issue when we think the government is out of accord with fundamental principles of the U.S. Constitution, which affects our ability as a Christian college to carry out our religious mission.”

He told CBN that “it’s not just churches that have religious liberties. It’s private individuals and it’s associations of people who gather together for a common religious purpose, like Christian higher education. We all have religious liberties. It’s not just churches, and it’s not just the freedom of worship. It’s the freedom of religion.”

Ryken said that he hoped Wheaton’s actions would prompt other evangelical institutions to file suit against the mandate as well. “To my knowledge, this is the largest number of lawsuits filed against the federal government on a religious liberty issue in the history of our country,” he told CBN. “And I have every expectation that additional evangelical institutions — colleges, universities, and other institutions — will also be filing suits by the end of the summer.”



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