

## HHS RULE WOULD ALLOW HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TO VOICE RELIGIOUS OBJECTIONS

The Trump administration recently announced an expansive proposed rule to enforce 25 existing statutory protections for HHS-funded programs allowing any person in the health care field to refuse to provide care based on religious or conscience-related objections, but opponents say the rule will lead to more discrimination and are already pondering legal action. HHS also announced that it would reverse Obama-era guidance intended to protect states from redirecting Medicaid funds away from Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers, arguing that the previous guidance was part of an Obama administration push to favor abortion rights.

The new proposed rule applies to any entity that receives full or partial funding from HHS and aims to protect people from participating in activities that violate their conscience, such as abortion, sterilization, or assisted suicide. Last week, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched a new, co-equal branch of the agency's Office of Civil Rights also designed to defend religious liberty for health care workers.

The proposed rule requires that entities that receive funds from HHS are in compliance with the Church Amendments, the Public Health Service Act, the Weldon Amendment, and the Affordable Care Act, among others—all of which are protected under the new HHS division.

"Today's actions represent promises kept by President Trump and a rollback of policies that had prevented many Americans from practicing their profession and following their conscience at the same time," Acting HHS Secretary Eric Hargan said in a statement on the draft rule. "Americans of faith should feel at home in our health system, not discriminated against, and states should have the right to take reasonable steps in overseeing their Medicaid programs and being good stewards of public funds."

Many health care advocates say that the measure could unfairly target women, minority groups, and LGBT people, and said that they would be willing to take legal action on the rule if the Trump administration approves it as is. ■