

# Archbishop Lori welcomes Supreme Court injunction

**By Maria Wiering and George P. Matysek Jr.**

Archbishop William E. Lori welcomed a Jan. 24 Supreme Court order that affirms an injunction blocking enforcement of a mandate requiring the Little Sisters of the Poor to provide contraceptive coverage in health insurance for their employees.

The order affirmed Justice Sonia Sotomayor's Dec. 31 order in the case. It temporarily blocks the federal government from requiring the sisters and their co-plaintiffs at Christian Brothers Services from having to meet that requirement of the Affordable Care Act.

"This is certainly a preliminary victory, but I'd also say a significant victory," said Archbishop Lori, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty. "The sisters have been very courageous and faithful in bringing forward the sanction."

The Baltimore and Denver provinces of the Little Sisters of the Poor, along with co-plaintiffs, Christian Brothers Services and Christian Brothers Employee Benefits Trust, filed a lawsuit against the federal government last year, objecting to the mandate to provide employees insurance coverage for contraception, sterilization and abortion.

Archbishop Lori said the Little Sisters are highlighting what is at the heart of all the cases against the mandate, "namely it is an incursion against religious freedom."

"It's the government sorting out our ministries for us in ways that are highly inappropriate," Archbishop Lori said. "We think that all our ministries are works of religion, and therefore deserving of an exemption from the HHS mandate."

The government argues that the Little Sisters would be exempt from the mandate if they sign a "self-certification form" acknowledging their religious objections to providing contraception coverage. If the sisters do not comply, they face potential daily fines of up to \$100 per employee.

Supporters of the sisters' suit contend the self-certification form would require them to tell their insurance provider of its obligations to provide contraception.

"The self-certification form is precisely what triggers the provision of the services that go against our faith," Archbishop Lori said. "Signing that paper means something. If it didn't mean anything, they wouldn't have them sign it."

The Supreme Court's most recent order noted that "to meet the condition for injunction pending appeal, applicants need not use the form prescribed by the government and need not send copies to third-party administrators."

The court's order specified that the injunction "should not be construed as an expression of the court's views on the merits" of the religious groups' legal claims. A statement from Mark Rienzi, senior counsel at the Becket Fund, which represents the Little Sisters, said the sisters are "delighted" with the Supreme Court's order. The statement said the order means the sisters and the other organizations whose benefits are managed by Christian Brothers Services and Christian Brothers Benefits Trust "must simply inform HHS of their religious identity and objections." The statement added that the suit is a class-action case on behalf of more than 400 Catholic organizations whose benefits are managed by the Christian Brothers. Archbishop Lori encouraged prayers for the Little Sisters and their success. "Their success will bring a great blessing to the entire Catholic community," he said. *Catholic News Service contributed to this story.*

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