

November 18, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As national leaders in the movement for Latino rights and equality, we support full reproductive rights, including access to birth control for all women, and reject efforts that put the preferences of insurance companies and employers over the right of women to make their own contraceptive health decisions in consultation with their doctors. We urge you to stand by your own administration's decision to issue new standards requiring all insurers to cover contraceptives without a deductible or a co-payment. As you know, these new rules already exempt churches and other religious institutions from having to provide contraceptive coverage without cost-sharing for their employees.

The Department of Health and Human Services' decision to require health plans to cover birth control without cost-sharing is one of the greatest advancements for women's health in decades. Unfortunately, some organizations and lawmakers are calling for an unfair expansion of the religious exemption—such as an exemption for religious hospitals and universities that serve and employ people of diverse faiths. Taking away this benefit from millions of women and their families has no basis in the law, is bad health policy, and is contrary to overwhelming public opinion.

Birth control use is nearly universal in the United States: 98% of sexually experienced women will have used birth control at some point in their lives, including Catholic women. Latinas, including Catholic Latinas, resoundingly support the women's preventive coverage benefit. In fact, 89 percent of Latina voters aged 18 to 34 support the requirement that health plans cover birth control at no cost.

Beliefs about prescription contraceptives are personal ones. It is unthinkable that a woman could be cut off from her ability to access legitimate medical and professional services solely because of the religious beliefs of her institutional employer. Millions of workers and their families would lose benefits if the refusal provision is expanded. For example, an expansion could impact nearly one million people (and their dependents) who work at Catholic hospitals, as well as approximately 2 million students and workers at religiously-affiliated universities. That's millions of American workers who would lose a benefit that finally makes an essential health care service affordable.

Eliminating expensive co-pays could open the door for many Latinas, who are disproportionately poor, to finally access the birth control of their choice. Research conducted by the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health shows that Latinas want the full range of birth control options available to them from the birth control pill to condoms to intrauterine devices.

We urge you stand by your policy on birth control coverage and continue to follow the recommendation of the respected, non-partisan Institute of Medicine. Preventive care for all women produces better health outcomes for all and reflects the fundamental belief that access to quality health care is a human right.

Sincerely,

California Immigrant Policy Center
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
Hispanic Federation
La Casa, Inc.
Labor Council on Latin American Advancement
Latino Caucus of American Public Health Association
Latino Commission on AIDS
LatinoJustice PRLDEF Latinas at Work Project
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Hispanic Health Foundation
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Institute for Latino Policy
National Latina Health Network
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Unid@s: The National Latina/Latino LGBT Human Rights Organization
Young Women United

cc: Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
David Plouffe
Bill Daley