A Policy Agenda for Religious Freedom in Health Care in 2025

The Christ Medicus Foundation and the Catholic Health Care Leadership Alliance announce a new policy agenda for the American people that protects and upholds life, religious freedom, and human dignity. Initially released in fall 2024, this agenda has been updated to address opportunities to advance the culture of life in this new Presidential Administration and new Congressional session. This agenda seeks to advance the exercise of religion and the participation of religious health care institutions to serve the wellbeing of the American people. Religious freedom is a basic human and civil right that is vital to the protection of the human dignity and civil rights of patients and consumers in health care. Religious exercise and the advancement of healthy loving communities in American civil society are essential to improving the health and flourishing of the American people.

This policy agenda aims to educate the public and federal and state policy makers about the urgent need to protect religious freedom and to bolster the participation of religious-based health institutions in the American health system.

The Agenda for Religious Freedom in Health Care – February 2025

1) Equal Opportunities for Faith-Based Health Care to Serve: Religious freedom in its highest form is the freedom to love. Research demonstrates that the practice of religion significantly advances and protects the health and wellbeing of patients. The new presidential administration and new session of Congress has an opportunity to further protect the religious freedom rights of religious health care institutions. Specifically, legislative and regulatory measures should be enacted that provide faith-based health care entities with an equal opportunity to deliver medical care to patients, to participate in federal health funding opportunities, and to compete in the private market.

2) Protecting the Life, Dignity, and Religious Freedom of All Americans in Medical Care: This session of Congress and the new Presidential administration should advance laws and regulations, that protect the life, health, and dignity of all patients and consumers from conception to natural death. The federal government's commitment to protecting life, health, and dignity should be particularly concerned with the most vulnerable, including preborn children, single pregnant mothers, patients with disabilities, patients in hospice, patients suffering from brain trauma, racial minorities, the underserved, and persons with limited English proficiency.

3) Defunding Planned Parenthood and any Federal Subsidization of Abortion: Consistent with the principles of the longstanding bi-partisan Hyde Amendment, Congress should defund Planned Parenthood and prevent federal tax dollars from directly or indirectly participating in, paying for, promoting, or supporting abortions, whether such abortions are committed through chemical or surgical means.

4) Rescinding HHS Regulations that Coerce Abortion, Gender Ideology, and other Unethical Violations of Human Dignity and Medical Conscience: The next presidential administration should rescind U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations and regulatory guidance that coerced or mandated health care professionals and entities to perform unethical procedures. These unethical and unlawful regulations included measures that coerced abortion and gender ideology, both of which harm vulnerable patients and inherently violate the basic human dignity.

5) Increasing Access to Life-Affirming Medical Care for the Most Vulnerable Americans: The new presidential administration and Congress should collaborate with faith-based organizations, religious based health care entities, and the private market to facilitate equal access to life affirming medical care for all Americans. Health care laws, policies, and regulations should adhere to the principle of subsidiarity by seeking to prioritize the capacity of faith-based entities, local communities, state governments, and the private market to facilitate health care access.

6) Strengthening Medical Conscience Rights and Religious Freedoms Protections in Health Care: The next presidential administration should fully enforce existing federal laws that protect the civil rights of religious freedom and medical conscience for medical professionals, health care entities, and patients. Conscience and religious freedom rights, along with the right to life, are the pillars upon which all other civil rights stand. The next president and Congress should work together to expand federal protections for religious freedom and medical conscience rights by passing the **Conscience Protection Act**. Such an expansion of conscience and religious liberty protections should include the ability of medical professionals and health care entities to file lawsuits in federal court to vindicate their rights if their medical conscience or religious convictions have been violated.

7) Expanding Health Care Civil Rights Protections for Vulnerable Patients and Families: Patients who are the most physically vulnerable are more susceptible to unjust discrimination in their medical care. Such unjust discrimination is unethical, harmful, and can be life threatening. Federal laws and regulations should create stronger civil rights laws to safeguard patients from discrimination in their medical care. Among other protections, new health care civil rights protections should prohibit the unjust denial of care because of a patient's disability, "quality of life", brain trauma, status as a patient in hospice, age, or productivity. All Americans have a right to receive medical care consistent with their well-formed moral and religious convictions.

8) Restoring the Social Safety Net for the Underserved and Vulnerable: The new Administration and Congress should support public policy solutions that restore the social safety net for persons who are most in need. These solutions should emphasize the whole health of every person in body, mind and soul inclusive of the importance of faith and community. Among other issues, **Medicaid regulatory policy should be structured to reflect the principle of subsidiarity**, giving states and communities flexibility, local control, and financial support to care for underserved patients. These public policy solutions should empower faith-based institutions to care for the health care needs of the underserved while respecting the well-formed moral and religious convictions of all.

9) Patient Freedom to Control their Ethical Life Affirming Health Care Options: The principles of justice and human dignity demand that patients exercise their human and civil right to control and make decisions about their medical care consistent with their well-formed moral and religious convictions.

The Christ Medicus Foundation shares Jesus Christ's healing love in health and wellness. We advance religious freedom for medical professionals and patients. We promote Christ-centered pro-life medical care. We offer our CURO Catholic health and wellness program for the medical needs and whole-person wellness of individuals and families. Founded in 1997, the Christ Medicus Foundation works to accomplish its mission through promoting public policy and education, supporting Christ-centered pro-life medical centers, and providing our CURO Catholic Health and Wellness Program.

The Catholic Health Care Leadership Alliance is an alliance of faithful Catholic organizations that supports the rights of patients and professionals to receive and provide health care in accordance with the moral, ethical, and social teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church through ongoing evangelization, education, advocacy, and mutual support.