

White house to shield health workers who refuse services on moral grounds

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(HealthDay)—Health workers who refuse to perform abortions or sex-

change operations on religious or moral grounds will now get more protection from the Trump administration.

Any medical professional who feels his or her rights have been violated can file a complaint with the new conscience and religious freedom division of the office for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The New York Times* reported Thursday.

The move, which comes one day before the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., was a priority for anti-abortion groups, according to the *Times*.

Roger Severino, director of the new civil rights office, told the newspaper that he and his staff would investigate each and every complaint.

The federal government has typically ignored such complaints or treated them with "outright hostility" for years, Severino added.

While supporters of the new office welcomed it as a way to protect the religious rights of medical professionals, critics said the Trump administration is giving [health](#) workers a license to discriminate.

Some fear there will be doctors who deny fertility treatments to lesbian couples and pharmacists who refuse to fill prescriptions for certain types of contraceptives, the *Times* reported.

"Donald Trump's administration is handing out permission slips for hospitals and providers to deny individuals, including women and LGBT patients, access to a full range of health services including lifesaving emergency care," Dawn Huckelbridge, director of the Women's Rights Initiative at American Bridge, told the newspaper.

HHS Acting Secretary Eric Hargan said during a media briefing that the new initiative simply follows an executive order issued last year by President Trump, who said that people of faith would no longer be bullied or silenced.

Conservative groups applauded the move.

"For more than 40 years, federal law has protected the conscience rights of all Americans in the context of health care," the Heritage Foundation said in a statement. "These protections have allowed for a diversity of values in health care and ensured that individuals can work and live according to their moral and religious beliefs.

"This new HHS division will help ensure that [health care](#) professionals enjoy the same rights they have had for decades—to not face coercion or discriminatory actions if they decide not to participate in certain procedures because of moral or religious objections."

More information: For more on the issue, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Conscience and Religious Freedom Division](#).

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