

Injunction granted in US birth control lawsuit

21 December 2013, by Tim Talley

A U.S. judge granted an injunction Friday that prohibits the government from enforcing the federal health care law's requirement that insurance coverage include access to the morning-after pill and similar contraceptives on almost 200 religious organizations that have filed a class-action lawsuit to block the mandate.

The [preliminary injunction](#) issued by U.S. District Judge Timothy DeGiusti will prevent the government from enforcing the mandate as the religious groups' lawsuit makes its way through the legal system. The lawsuit was filed in October on behalf of 187 ministries that provide their employees with [health benefits](#) through GuideStone Financial Resources, the health benefits arm of the Southern Baptist Convention.

In the lawsuit, the ministries object to providing four out of 20 Food and Drug Administration-approved [contraceptives](#), including the morning-after pill and the week-after pill, which they allege may cause early abortions. The [religious groups](#) include Reaching Souls International, which trains pastors and cares for orphans in Africa, India and Cuba, and Truett-McConnell College, a Georgia Baptist college.

In his 16-page decision, DeGiusti said the ministries have the right to challenge the [health care law](#)'s contraceptive mandate and that an injunction is needed to prevent the [federal government](#) from enforcing it on them.

The lawsuit is similar to one filed in Oklahoma City last year by Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., which calls itself a "biblically founded business." That lawsuit also challenges the mandate that employers provide coverage for the morning-after pill and similar drugs. In July, a federal judge granted a temporary exemption to the Oklahoma City-based arts and crafts chain, a ruling the government has appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Hobby Lobby's lawsuit claims the government mandate is forcing the Christian family that owns the chain "to violate their deeply held religious beliefs under threat of heavy fines, penalties and lawsuits." Failure to provide the drugs in the company's [health insurance](#) plan could lead to fines of up to \$1.3 million a day, the company said.

Hobby Lobby's owners have said they believe life begins at conception, and they oppose birth control methods that can prevent implantation of a fertilized egg in the uterus, such as an intrauterine device or forms of emergency contraception.

An attorney for the government, Benjamin J. Berwick, did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment.

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