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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CARDINAL URGES SUPPORT FOR HEALTH CARE CONSCIENCE RIGHTS ACT

*Choosing between religious integrity and participation in health care system unacceptable
Religious freedom, conscience rights foundational to American society
Conscience rights protections essential to Catholic ministries*

WASHINGTON—Cardinal Seán O’Malley of Boston, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Pro-Life Activities, urged members of the U.S. House of Representatives to support the Health Care Conscience Rights Act of 2013. H.R. 940 was introduced by Rep. Diane Black (R-TN) on March 4; the bill has 66 co-sponsors.

“Protection for conscience rights in health care is of especially great importance to the Catholic Church, which daily contributes to the welfare of American society through a network of schools, social services, hospitals and assisted living facilities,” Cardinal O’Malley wrote in a March 8 letter to Congress. “These institutions, which have been part of the Church’s ministry since the earliest days of the Republic, arose from religious conviction. They provide a substantial savings to communities and states throughout the nation, and we believe they contribute to the common good.”

“The legal protections which allow us to fulfill our obligation to serve others, without compromising our religious or moral convictions, are essential to the continued vitality of these ministries,” he said.

Cardinal O’Malley wrote that “while those protections have long enjoyed bipartisan consensus, they are under greatly increased pressure today.” He cited the mandate for coverage of contraception, sterilization and abortifacient drugs and devices under the Affordable Care Act’s “preventive services” provision and referred representatives to a letter written by Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, who set forth the need for such legislation in greater detail.

“A failure to provide clear and enforceable protection for a right of conscience could undermine Americans’ access to quality health care. Providers of health care, as well as those who offer or purchase insurance, should not face an unacceptable choice between preserving their religious and moral integrity or participating in our health care system,” the cardinal wrote. He closed by urging support for the bill and the incorporation of its policies into upcoming “must-pass” legislation.

The full text of Cardinal O’Malley’s letter may be found at: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/upload/Letter_to_Congress_Cardinal_O-Malley_Mar8_2013l.pdf and Archbishop Lori’s February 15 letter is available at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/upload/Letter-from-Archbishop-Lori-to-Congress.pdf.

Keywords: U.S. bishops, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, Sean Cardinal O’Malley, Pro-Life Committee, Archbishop William Lori, Baltimore, religious liberty, religious freedom, Catholic Church, HHS mandate, preventive services, sterilization, abortion, contraception, conscience protection, conscience rights, appropriations, Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, health care reform

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