



HHS OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Safeguarding Federal Conscience and Related Protections in Health Care

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights is responsible for enforcing federal conscience protection statutes passed by Congress. These statutes apply in particular HHS-funded programs and protect the rights of health care professionals, institutions, organizations, trainees, health plans, and patients to exercise their conscience respecting certain procedures or services.

A [Dear Colleague Letter](#) summarizes the requirements of the federal conscience protection statutes to encourage the regulated community to voluntarily comply with these laws.

The Dear Colleague Letter addresses the following protections and statutes.

HEALTH CARE CONSCIENCE PROTECTIONS

for health care providers and entities:

-  Church Amendments
-  Coats-Snowe Amendment
-  Weldon Amendment
-  Vaccines for Children and Applicable State Law Exemptions
-  Affordable Care Act Conscience Protections
-  Medicare and Medicaid Program Protections for Providers and Plans

for beneficiaries and patients in healthcare:

-  Advance Directives and the Patient Self-Determination Act
-  Observance of Religious Beliefs in Medicaid
-  Religious Nonmedical Health Care Institutions