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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO,

Plaintiff,

v.

ALEX M. AZAR II, Secretary of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; ROGER SERVERINO, Director, Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES; and DOES 1–25,

Defendants.

No. C 19-02405 WHA

*Related to*

No. C 19-02769 WHA

*and*

No. C 19-02916 WHA

**ORDER RE MOTIONS TO DISMISS AND FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT AND REQUESTS FOR JUDICIAL NOTICE**

**INTRODUCTION**

In these challenges to a final agency rule allowing those with religious, moral, or other conscientious objections to refuse to provide abortions and certain other medical services, federal defendants move to dismiss or, in the alternative, for summary judgment. Plaintiffs oppose and also move for their own summary judgment. For the following reasons, defendants’ motion to dismiss is **DENIED**. To the extent stated below, plaintiffs’ motion for summary judgment is **GRANTED**.

**STATEMENT**

Following *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), at least one religiously affiliated hospital became forced by a court to allow its facilities to be used for abortion procedures. *See, e.g.*,

1 *Taylor v. St. Vincent's Hospital*, 369 F. Supp. 948 (D. Mont. 1973). That provoked the first  
2 federal statute to ensure that federally-financed hospitals as well as doctors, among others, could  
3 refuse to perform such procedures on grounds of conscientious objection. Over the years, the  
4 right to refuse on such grounds has received yet more attention in further contexts via federal  
5 statutes. Defendant United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has  
6 recently promulgated a rule that, plaintiffs say, expands these protections beyond what Congress  
7 intended and will hamstring the delivery of health care. Plaintiffs fear losing important federal  
8 grants as a result of their inability to comply with the new rule.

9 Under the new rule, to preview just one example, an ambulance driver would be free,  
10 on religious or moral grounds, to eject a patient en route to a hospital upon learning that the  
11 patient needed an emergency abortion. Such harsh treatment would be blessed by the new rule.  
12 One important question presented herein is the extent to which such scenarios conflict with the  
13 underlying statutes themselves. Although this order does not accept all of plaintiffs' criticisms,  
14 this order holds that the new rule conflicts with those statutes in a number of ways and upsets  
15 the balance drawn by Congress between protecting conscientious objections versus protecting  
16 the uninterrupted effective flow of health care to Americans.

17 **1. HISTORY OF CONSCIENCE STATUTES.**

18 Starting in 1973, Congress enacted laws providing certain protections to doctors and  
19 others who objected to performing abortions and certain other procedures. Relevant for our  
20 purposes are the following: (1) the Church Amendment; (2) the Coats-Snowe Amendment;  
21 (3) Medicaid and Medicare Advantage law; (4) the Weldon Amendment; and (5) the Patient and  
22 Affordable Care Act. Since the new rule purports to interpret these statutes, let's review them.

23 **A. Church Amendment (1973).**

24 Senator Frank Church of Idaho will be remembered by many for his opposition to the  
25 Vietnam War, his hearings exposing abuse by CIA surveillance of American citizens, and his  
26 championing of wilderness and environmental causes. For our immediate purposes, however,  
27 we remember him for the Church Amendment.  
28

1           Following *Roe v. Wade*, as stated, a Montana district court issued a temporary injunction  
2 requiring a Catholic hospital to allow its facilities to be used for sterilization, specifically, a tubal  
3 ligation procedure. *Taylor*, 369 F. Supp. at 948. Senator Church stated the purpose of his  
4 amendment was, among other things, to clarify the intent of Congress as to “physicians, nurses,  
5 or institutions” who don’t perform “abortions or sterilization in religious affiliated hospitals  
6 where such operations are contrary to religious belief.” 119 Cong. Rec. 9595–97.

7           The Church Amendment provided that the receipt of federal funds by any individual  
8 or entity did not authorize any court or public official to require such individual to perform  
9 or assist in the performance of any sterilization procedure or abortion contrary to his religion  
10 or conscience, nor to require such entity to make its facilities available for sterilization or  
11 abortion if such procedure was prohibited by the entity on the basis of religious or moral  
12 convictions. Entities receiving federal funds were barred from discriminating “in the  
13 employment, promotion, or termination of employment” of physicians or health care personnel  
14 as well as from discriminating “in the extension of staff or other privileges” to physicians  
15 or “health care personnel” based upon their conscientious refusal to perform or assist in the  
16 performance of those procedures. The amendment also provided that “[n]o individual shall be  
17 required to perform or assist in the performance of any part of a health service program or  
18 research activity funded in whole or in part under a program administered by the Secretary  
19 of Health and Human Services if his performance or assistance in the performance of such part  
20 of such program or activity would be contrary to his religious beliefs or moral convictions.”  
21 42 U.S.C. § 300a-7. The statute gave no delegation of authority to any agency to issue  
22 legislative rules (or even interpretive rules, for that matter).

23           **B. Coats-Snowe Amendment (1996).**

24           Twenty-three years passed. No agency rule issued or was even proposed. In 1996,  
25 however, a new concern surfaced, namely that medical students felt coerced into learning how  
26 to perform abortions. Still, no agency acted — but Congress did act. A 1996 amendment  
27 drew sponsorship from Senators Olympia Snowe and Dan Coats. Until her recent retirement,  
28 Senator Snowe of Maine received notice for her finding bi-partisan ways forward through

1 contentious issues. Senator Dan Coats became known for sponsoring the “Don’t Ask, Don’t  
2 Tell” policy of the early 1990s. He later served as Director of National Intelligence from  
3 March 2017 to August 2019.

4 The Coats-Snowe Amendment prohibited, among other things, government entities  
5 receiving federal financial assistance from discriminating against any “health care entity” that  
6 “refuses to undergo training in the performance of induced abortions, to require or provide such  
7 training, to perform such abortions, or to provide referrals for such training or such abortions”  
8 or refusing to make arrangements for those activities. The amendment specifically defined the  
9 term “health care entity” to include “an individual physician, a postgraduate physician training  
10 program, and a participant in a program of training in the health professions.” 42 U.S.C. § 238n.

11 The Amendment also required government entities receiving federal financial instance to  
12 accredit health care entities “that would be accredited but for the accrediting agency’s reliance  
13 upon an accreditation standards that requires an entity to perform an induced abortion or require,  
14 provide, or refer for training in the performance of induced abortions, or make arrangements for  
15 such training.” The Amendment provided express rulemaking authority as to that provision  
16 only. *Id.* at § 238n(b)(1).

### 17 C. Medicaid and Medicare Advantage (1997).

18 The following year, in 1997, Congress passed the Balanced Budget Act, which changed  
19 key components of Medicaid and introduced Medicare Advantage. Of importance, the statute  
20 stated that Medicaid-managed organizations and Medicare Advantage plans were not  
21 required to “provide, reimburse for, or provide coverage of a counseling or referral service”  
22 if the organization objected to the service on moral or religious grounds. 42 U.S.C.  
23 §§ 1395w-22(j)(3)(B), 1396u-2(b)(3)(B). The Social Security Act provided express rulemaking  
24 authority to HHS to implement the Medicaid and Medicare Advantage provisions. *Id.* at  
25 §§ 1302(a); 1395w-26(b)(1).

1                                   **D.     Weldon Amendment (2004).**

2           In 2004 came the Weldon Amendment. Representative Dave Weldon, a doctor,  
3           made headlines for legislation regarding home ownership affordability, vaccine safety, and  
4           the prevention of human cloning.

5           The Weldon Amendment provided that no federal funds “may be made available to  
6           a Federal agency or program, or to a State or local government, if such agency, program, or  
7           government subjects any institutional or individual health care entity to discrimination on the  
8           basis that the health care entity does not provide, pay for, *provide coverage of, or refer for*  
9           *abortions.*” Importantly, it expressly defined the term “health care entity” for purposes of the  
10          Amendment to include “an individual physician or other *health care professional, a hospital,*  
11          *a provider-sponsored organization, a health maintenance organization, a health insurance*  
12          *plan, or any other kind of health care facility, organization, or plan.*” *See, e.g.,* Appropriations  
13          Act, Pub. L. No. 115-245, Div. B., § 507(d), 132 Stat. 2981, 3118 (2018) (emphasis added).  
14          This definition differed from the definition of the same phrase as used in the Coats-Snowe  
15          Amendment. The Weldon Amendment was meant to protect “health care entities” from being  
16          forced by the government to provide, cover, refer, or pay for abortions. HMOs and health  
17          insurance plans could not, under the amendment, be discriminated against with respect to federal  
18          funds on account of their refusal to cover abortions.

19                                   **E.     Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010).**

20          Finally, in 2010 came the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act with several  
21          new conscience provisions. One such notable provision stated the federal government or any  
22          governmental agency that received federal financial assistance under the act “may not subject  
23          an individual or institutional health care entity to discrimination on the basis that the entity  
24          does not provide any health care item or service furnished for the purpose of causing, or for  
25          the purpose of assisting in causing, the death of any individual, such as by assisted suicide,  
26          euthanasia, or mercy killing.” 42 U.S.C. § 18113. For that section only, the Act defined  
27          “health care entity” in the same way as the Weldon Amendment, to include, “an individual  
28          physician or other health care professional, a hospital, a provider-sponsored organization,

1 a health maintenance organization, a health insurance plan, or any other kind of health care  
2 facility, organization, or plan.” *Ibid.*

3 Another provision said that a State could prohibit abortion coverage in qualified health  
4 care plans, and that a qualified health care plan could not discriminate against a health  
5 care provider or entity that was unwilling to provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for  
6 abortions. *Id.* § 18023. A further provision allowed individuals to seek exemption based on,  
7 among other things, their religion. *Id.* § 18081(b)(5)(A). The Act also provided HHS with  
8 express rulemaking authority to implement the Act. *Id.* § 18041(a)(1).

9 **2. THE HISTORY OF AGENCY RULES REGARDING THESE STATUTES.**

10 None of the foregoing statutes other than the Coats-Snowe Amendment, the  
11 Medicare/Medicaid laws, and the Affordable Care Act expressly delegated rulemaking authority  
12 to any agency. Even in those cases, the delegation remained limited. From 1973 until 2008, no  
13 agency issued any rule of any type concerning any health care conscience statute.

14 **A. 2008 and 2011 Rules.**

15 In August 2008, however, HHS first proposed an interpretive rule for the enforcement  
16 of the conscience statutes then in place. The comments in response to the proposed rule  
17 expressed many of the same concerns as plaintiffs express in this instant action, stating, for  
18 example, that the definitions of the terms “assist in the performance of” and “health care entity”  
19 were too broad. Critics also worried that the proposal conflicted with Medicaid, Title X (which  
20 required family planning projects to offer certain family planning services), and the Emergency  
21 Medical Training and Active Labor Act (EMTALA) (which required certain hospitals to  
22 stabilize or transfer patients in emergency situations). 42 U.S.C. §§ 300; 1395dd.

23 The 2008 rule defined many of the same statutory terms as does the 2019 rule at issue,  
24 such as “assist in the performance” and “health care entity,” to take only two examples. *See*  
25 *Ensuring That HHS Funds Do Not Support Coercive or Discriminatory Policies or Practices*  
26 *in Violation of Federal Law*, 73 Fed. Reg. at 78,082, 78,097 (Dec. 19, 2008). It ultimately  
27 prohibited HHS fund recipients from discriminating against health care entities that did not  
28 “provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions,” and further required HHS fund

1 recipients to certify compliance with the rule. For those that did not comply with the rule, HHS  
2 stated it “intend[ed] to work with recipients . . . to ensure compliance with the requirements or  
3 prohibitions promulgated in this regulation, and, if such assistance fails to achieve compliance,  
4 the Department will consider all legal options, including termination of funding.” The rule  
5 designated the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to receive complaints of discrimination and  
6 coercion based on the health care conscience protection statutes. *Id.* at 78,074–79, 93.

7         Three months after the rule took effect, however, and with a different administration in  
8 office, HHS proposed to rescind the rule in order to review the regulation and “ensure its  
9 consistency with current Administration policy and to reevaluate the necessity for regulation.”  
10 74 Fed. Reg. 10,207 (Mar. 10, 2009). HHS received over 300,000 comments in response.  
11 Many of these comments expressed concern the 2008 rule “unacceptably impacted patient rights  
12 and restricted access to health care and conflicted with federal law, state law, and other  
13 guidelines addressing informed consent.” Regulation for the Enforcement of Federal Health  
14 Care Provider Conscience Protection Laws, 76 Fed. Reg. 9968, 9971 (Feb. 23, 2011). In 2011,  
15 HHS rescinded in part and revised in part the 2008 rule. Of importance, the 2011 rule rescinded  
16 the definitions “because of concerns that they may have caused confusion regarding the scope of  
17 the federal health care provider conscience protection statutes” and stated “individual  
18 investigations will provide the best means of answering questions about the application of the  
19 statutes in particular circumstances.” The rule also stated “the certification requirements in the  
20 2008 Final Rule are unnecessary to ensure compliance with the federal health care provider  
21 conscience protection statutes, and that the certification requirements created unnecessary  
22 additional financial and administrative burdens on health care entities.” The rule further  
23 designated the OCR to receive complaints of discrimination and coercion based on the  
24 conscience protection statutes and to coordinate the handling of complaints with the HHS  
25 funding components. *Id.* at 9974.

26                 **B.         The Instant Rule.**

27                 In May 2017, President Donald Trump issued an executive order instructing the Attorney  
28 General to “issue guidance interpreting religious liberty protections in Federal law.” Promoting



1 Free Speech and Religious Liberty, 82 Fed. Reg. 21,675 (May 4, 2017). In October 2017,  
2 Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a memorandum to “guide all administrative agencies  
3 and executive departments” in doing so. Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty Attorney  
4 General Memorandum (Oct. 6, 2017). In January 2018, HHS proposed to resurrect most of the  
5 2008 rule, stating that the 2011 rescission had “created confusion over what is and is not  
6 required under Federal conscience and anti-discrimination laws.” Protecting Statutory  
7 Conscience Rights in Health Care, 83 Fed. Reg. 3880 (Jan. 26, 2018). HHS received over  
8 242,000 comments in response. Many comments expressed the same concerns as plaintiffs here,  
9 including among other things, that the rule would lead to a decrease in access to health care;  
10 that the proposed definitions for terms such as “health care entity,” “referral or refer for,” and  
11 “assist in the performance of” were too broad; and that the rule conflicted with laws such as  
12 EMTALA and Title X (*see, e.g.*, AR 006-58592, 008-187087, 008-187916, 008-191263).

13 In May 2019, HHS issued its final rule — the rule in suit. Protecting Statutory  
14 Conscience Rights in Health Care, 84 Fed. Reg. 23,170 (May 21, 2019). It defines various  
15 nouns, verbs, and phrases in the conscience statutes in an expansive way, as explained below,  
16 so as to inflate the scope of protections for conscientious objectors. The rule also provides  
17 compliance and certification provisions that require covered entities to certify their compliance  
18 with federal conscience statutes, anti-discrimination laws, *and the rule itself*. Covered entities  
19 that fail to abide by these requirements risk losing the *entirety* of their federal funding, not just  
20 categories of funding such as grants, loans, and insurance.

21 Plaintiff City and County of San Francisco filed the instant action, alleging the rule  
22 violated the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and the Constitution. *City and County of*  
23 *San Francisco v. Alex M. Azar II, et al.*, C 19-02405 WHA. A few weeks later, plaintiff State of  
24 California filed an action making most of the same claims as San Francisco with an additional  
25 FOIA claim. *State of California v. Alex M. Azar II, et al.*, C 19-02769 WHA. A week later,  
26 plaintiffs County of Santa Clara and various health and LGBTQ organizations also filed an  
27 action challenging the rule, making the same claims. *County of Santa Clara, et al., v. U.S. Dept.*  
28 *of Health and Human Services, et al.*, C 19-02916 WHA. An order granted the parties’



1 stipulated request to postpone the effective date of the rule until November 22, 2019, thus  
 2 obviating the need to consider any provisional relief. Defendants now move to dismiss under  
 3 FRCP 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6) or, in the alternative, for summary judgment. Plaintiffs also move  
 4 for summary judgment (Dkt. Nos. 14, 66, 89, 136). The Court appreciates the briefing and  
 5 argument by both sides and the notable contributions made by amici.

## 6 ANALYSIS

### 7 1. RULE 12(B)(1) MOTION TO DISMISS.

8 Defendants raise two jurisdictional arguments under FRCP 12(b)(1). *First*, they argue  
 9 plaintiffs' spending clause and establishment clause claims are not ripe for review because  
 10 they have not identified any specific enforcement actions against them. *Second*, they argue the  
 11 physician plaintiffs in *Santa Clara* lack standing to bring free speech, equal protection, and due  
 12 process claims on behalf of their patients.

#### 13 A. Plaintiffs' Spending Clause and Establishment 14 Clause Claims Are Ripe for Review.

15 Determining whether an action is ripe for judicial review requires an evaluation of:  
 16 (1) whether delayed review would cause hardship to the plaintiffs; (2) whether judicial  
 17 intervention would inappropriately interfere with further administrative action; and (3) whether  
 18 the courts would benefit from further factual development of the issues presented. *Ohio Forestry*  
 19 *Ass'n, Inc. v. Sierra Club*, 523 U.S. 726, 733 (1998). Hardship can occur when the impact of the  
 20 regulation can be felt immediately by those subject to it in conducting their day-to-day affairs.  
 21 *Toilet Goods Ass'n, Inc. v. Gardner*, 387 U.S. 158, 164 (1967). Specifically, "where a regulation  
 22 requires an immediate and significant change in the plaintiffs' conduct of their affairs with  
 23 serious penalties attached to noncompliance," the claims are ripe for review. *Abbott Labs. v.*  
 24 *Gardner*, 387 U.S. 136, 153 (1967), *overruled on other grounds by Califano v. Sanders*,  
 25 430 U.S. 99, 105 (1977).

26 Defendants argue plaintiffs' establishment clause and spending clause claims are not ripe  
 27 because the claims rest on contingent future events. In particular, they contend that plaintiffs  
 28 have only provided speculative scenarios in which the two claims can be evaluated. Not so.  
 Regardless of how the rule is interpreted, plaintiffs would need to conduct extensive inquiries

1 into hospitals and personnel to determine their compliance with not only the underlying statutes,  
2 but the rule itself. Plaintiffs have further provided examples of numerous hospital policies which  
3 contain provisions regarding discrimination that may need to be overhauled under the final rule.  
4 For example, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital policies state (*State of California*, Dkt.  
5 No. 69 ¶ 8):

6 In the event a staff member feels reluctant to participate in an  
7 aspect of patient care because the patient's condition, treatment  
8 plan, or physician's orders are in conflict with the staff member's  
9 religious beliefs, cultural values, or ethics, the staff member's  
10 written request for accommodation will be considered if the  
11 request does not negatively affect the quality of patient's care.

12 Such policies would need to be rewritten and alternative business practices or procedures  
13 created to comply with the rule while also ensuring patients receive adequate care. Furthermore,  
14 if plaintiffs alternatively choose not to comply with the rule, they would need to prepare for the  
15 contingency of the termination of all federal funding. Although defendants have stated that the  
16 extent of enforcement in regard to funding is now unknown given the postponement of the rule,  
17 this does not change the fact that the whole point of the rule is to "clarify" the statutes in a way  
18 that will impose changes to comply. Accordingly, defendants' motion to dismiss plaintiffs'  
19 spending clause and establishment clause claims is **DENIED**.

20 **B. The *Santa Clara* Physician Plaintiffs Have Standing.**

21 Defendants challenge the standing of the *Santa Clara* physician plaintiffs in raising free  
22 speech, equal protection, and due process claims on behalf of their LGBTQ and abortion-seeking  
23 patients. Although plaintiffs generally must assert their own legal rights and interests, a third  
24 party may have standing depending on the relationship of the litigant to the person whose right  
25 he or she seeks to assert and the ability of the third party to assert his or her own rights.

26 *Singleton v. Wulff*, 428 U.S. 106, 114–16 (1976).

27 Defendants attempt to distinguish *Singleton* from the instant case by stating its holding  
28 only applies to physicians who perform nonmedically indicated abortions and are asserting  
rights on behalf of pregnant women. Not so. *Singleton*'s holding is broader, as the Supreme  
Court found that the physicians had third party standing given the *confidential nature of the  
relationship between physicians and women seeking the abortion* as well as the obstacles women

1 have in asserting their right to an abortion. In particular, women generally cannot safely secure  
2 abortions without the aid of physicians and “the constitutionally protected abortion decision is  
3 one in which the physician is intimately involved.” *Singleton*, 428 U.S. at 115–17.

4 In the instant case, physicians are similarly asserting claims on behalf of women seeking  
5 abortions and LGBTQ patients. Doctors and their patients have a confidential relationship,  
6 especially when it comes to asserting rights related to invasive procedures and treatments.  
7 Furthermore, most of the medical procedures at issue here such as abortions, gender-affirming  
8 surgery, and HIV treatments cannot be safely secured without the aid of a physician. The rights  
9 of the individual physician plaintiffs and their patients here are thus closely intertwined.

10 Because the physician plaintiffs in *Santa Clara* have standing, defendants’ motion to dismiss  
11 the *Santa Clara* physician plaintiffs’ free speech, equal protection, and due process claims is

12 **DENIED.**

13 **2. RULES 12(B)(6) AND 56 — THE APA CLAIM.**

14 On the merits, this order holds that the new rule sets forth new definitions of statutory  
15 terms that conflict with the statutes themselves — expansive definitions that would upset the  
16 balance drawn by Congress between protecting conscientious objectors versus facilitating the  
17 uninterrupted provision of health care to Americans.

18 With the minor exceptions noted below, the new rule is purely an interpretive rule,  
19 not a legislative rule. An agency, of course, must interpret a statute under its care. But an  
20 interpretation, even if cast in the form of a regulation, is nothing more than that —  
21 an interpretation. The statute itself is what has the force of law, not the interpretation.  
22 No interpretation can add or subtract from the actual scope of the statute itself. If the agency  
23 misconstrues a statute, then the statute controls, not the interpretation.

24 The guiding principle, therefore, is that no interpretation, not even an agency  
25 interpretation, can add or subtract from what the statute itself specifies. In a close case of  
26 statutory construction, we might defer to the agency’s interpretation. But otherwise, we must  
27 remain faithful to the statutes enacted by Congress. And while a legislative rule may add to a  
28 statute, it cannot subtract from a statute. Fidelity to the statute is paramount.

1 In reading the statutes in question, the Court sees that Congress tried to strike a balance  
 2 between two competing considerations. One consideration was recognition that, due to religious  
 3 or ethical beliefs, some doctors, nurses, and hospitals, among others, wanted no part in the  
 4 performing of abortions and sterilizations, among other medical procedures, and Congress  
 5 wanted to protect them from discrimination for their refusal to perform them. The countervailing  
 6 consideration was recognition of the need to preserve the effective delivery of health care to  
 7 Americans, including to those seeking, for example, abortions and sterilizations. Every doctor  
 8 or nurse, for example, who bowed out of a procedure for religious or ethical reasons became one  
 9 more doctor or nurse whose shifts had to be covered by someone else, a burden on the healthcare  
 10 system. Congress struck a balance between these two opposing considerations.

11 In reading the rule in question, the Court sees a persistent and pronounced redefinition  
 12 of statutory terms that significantly expands the scope of protected conscientious objections.  
 13 As laudable as that sounds, however, it would come at a cost — a burden on the effective  
 14 delivery of health care to Americans in derogation of the actual balance struck by Congress.

15 **A. Definitions.**

16 The new rule includes five columns (in the Federal Register) of new definitions of  
 17 statutory terms. These definitions, as will be seen, make the mischief. Then follow many  
 18 columns of restatements of the statutes in question, which restatements remain largely true to the  
 19 words used by Congress (but whose scope becomes expanded by the definitions). Finally come  
 20 concluding columns imposing “assurance” and “compliance” certificate obligations on  
 21 applicants for federal funds. This order will now turn to the definitions, the heart of the problem.

22 *(1) “Assist in the Performance of.”*

23 The reader will recall that the Church Amendment protected not only those individuals  
 24 who “perform” abortions and sterilizations but also those individuals who “assist in the  
 25 performance” of abortions and sterilizations. Only the Church Amendment used “assist in  
 26 the performance of,” and it did so as follows:

27 The receipt of any grant, contract, loan, or loan guarantee under  
 28 the Public Health Service Act, the Community Mental Health  
 Centers Act, or the Developmental Disabilities Services and  
 Facilities Construction Act by any individual or entity does not

1 authorize any court or any public official or other public authority  
2 to require (1) such individual *to perform or assist in the*  
3 *performance of any sterilization procedure or abortion if his*  
4 *performance or assistance in the performance of such procedure or*  
5 *abortion would be contrary to his religious beliefs or moral*  
6 *convictions; [ . . . ]*

7 42 U.S.C. § 300a-7 (emphasis added).

8 The final rule now defines “assist in the performance” as:

9 [T]o take an action that has a specific, reasonable, and articulable  
10 connection to furthering a procedure or a part of a health service  
11 program or research activity undertaken by or with another person  
12 or entity. This may include counseling, referral, training, or  
13 otherwise making arrangements for the procedure or a part of a  
14 health service program or research activity, depending on whether  
15 aid is provided by such actions.

16 “Assist in the performance” was originally intended to cover *only those individuals in the*  
17 *operating room who actually assisted the physician in carrying out the abortion or sterilization*  
18 *procedure*. This is clear from the colloquy between Senator Russell Long and Senator Church  
19 on the floor prior to the passage of the amendment:

20 Mr. Long: The thought occurs to me that it would seem  
21 reasonable to say that where one seeks a sterilization  
22 procedure or an abortion, it could not be performed  
23 because there might be a nurse or an attendant  
24 somewhere in the hospital who objected to it. If it  
25 was not a matter of concern to that individual, it  
26 seems to me that that is getting to be a little far-  
27 fetched, that is, that someone who had nothing to do  
28 with the matter *and was not involved in it one way or*  
*the other, just someone who happened to be working*  
*in a hospital, and was not involved in an abortion or*  
*a sterilization procedure*, could veto the rights of a  
physician and the rights of patients to have a  
procedure which the Supreme Court has upheld.

Mr. Church: Let me make clear, Mr. President, that such is not  
my intention. I understand the basis for the  
expression of concern on the part of the Senator from  
Louisiana, but the words on line 19, “. . . of such  
physician or other health care personnel, . . .” relate  
back to the same words used on lines 12 and 13 and  
must be read in context with those words.

Mr. Long: If I understand what the Senator is saying, he is  
saying that a nurse or an attendant who has religious  
feelings contrary to sterilization or abortion should  
not be required and would not be required by any  
Federal activity to participate in any such procedure

1 to which they hold strong moral or religious  
 2 convictions to the contrary.

3 Mr. Church: That is correct.

4 Mr. Long: So that this would not, in effect, say that one who  
 5 sought such an operation would be denied it because  
 6 someone working in the hospital objected *who had*  
 7 *no responsibility, directly or indirectly with regard*  
 8 *to the performance of that procedure. It would only*  
 9 *be that one who was involved in performing the*  
 10 *operation or in assisting to perform the operation*  
 11 *could not be required to participate when he or she*  
 12 *held convictions against that type of procedure.*

13 Mr. Church: *The Senator is correct.* The amendment is meant  
 14 to give protection to the physicians, to the nurses,  
 15 to the hospitals themselves, if they are religious  
 16 affiliated institutions. So the fact Federal funds  
 17 may have been extended will not be used as an  
 18 excuse for requiring physicians, nurses, or  
 19 institutions to perform abortions or sterilizations that  
 20 are contrary to their religious precepts. That is the  
 21 objective of the amendment. *There is no intention*  
 22 *here to permit a frivolous objection from someone*  
 23 *unconnected with the procedure to be the basis for a*  
 24 *refusal to perform what would otherwise be a legal*  
 25 *operation.*

16 119 Cong. Rec. 9597 (1973) (emphasis added). Accordingly, the phrase “assist in the  
 17 performance” refers only to the assistance provided by nurses or other medical professionals  
 18 involved in the procedure itself in the operating room, not the ambulance driver or anyone else  
 19 outside the time and place of the procedure itself.

20 HHS nevertheless insists that “driving a person to a hospital or clinic for a scheduled  
 21 abortion could constitute ‘assisting in the performance of’ an abortion, as would physically  
 22 delivering drugs for inducing abortion.” 84 Fed. Reg. 23,188 (May 21, 2019). At recent oral  
 23 argument for a similar challenge to the same rule in the United States District Court for the  
 24 Southern District of New York, District Judge Paul Engelmayer presented counsel for HHS with  
 25 the following situation:

26 A pregnant woman takes an ambulance across Central Park to  
 27 Mt. Sinai Hospital and, midway through, from conversation with  
 28 the ambulance driver, it becomes clear that she is headed there to  
 terminate an ectopic pregnancy. The driver tells her to get out in  
 the middle of the park, and the employer fires the ambulance  
 driver for that. Is the ambulance driver assisting in the



1 performance of the procedure if the ambulance driver takes her to  
2 the hospital?

3 In response, government counsel insisted “[t]he rule protects an ambulance driver’s ability  
4 not to assist in the performance of a procedure to which the driver has an objection” (*State of*  
5 *California*, Dkt. No. 133, Exh. A at 116:21–25; 117:1–18). During oral argument in the instant  
6 action, HHS again insisted that ambulance drivers should and would be covered (*Id.*, Dkt. No.  
7 139 at 48–52).

8 Under a proper reading of the Church Amendment, however, no driver or EMT could  
9 ever qualify, under any circumstance, as an individual who “assists in the performance of” an  
10 abortion or sterilization. The colloquy between Senators Church and Long demonstrated that  
11 the Church Amendment was meant to protect those who would be involved in carrying out the  
12 procedure itself, such as physicians, nurses assisting the physicians, and others in the operating  
13 room necessary for the procedure itself. An ambulance driver assists in no such way.  
14 Ambulance drivers and EMTs aboard ambulances transport and stabilize. Accordingly, neither  
15 an ambulance driver nor an EMT “assist in the performance” and thus fall outside the Church  
16 Amendment.

17 Also covered under HHS’s interpretation of the rule would be schedulers and  
18 housekeeping staff. HHS has stated “[s]cheduling an abortion or preparing a room and the  
19 instruments for an abortion are necessary parts of the process of providing an abortion, and  
20 it is reasonable to consider performing these actions as constituting ‘assistance.’” 84 Fed. Reg.  
21 23,186–87 (May 21, 2019). Under the rule, a clerk scheduling surgeries for an operating room  
22 could refuse to reserve slots for abortions and sterilizations. So could an employee who merely  
23 sterilizes and places surgical instruments or ensures that the supply cabinets in the operating  
24 room are fully stocked in preparation for an abortion. For the reasons already stated, the Church  
25 Amendment was never intended to apply to those who have no role in the actual performance of  
26 the abortion or sterilization. Neither those who schedule abortions nor those who prepare an  
27 operating room assist in the performance of such a procedure under the Church Amendment.

28 HHS also states it disagrees with any interpretation of “assisting in the performance” that  
excludes pre- and post-operative support to an abortion patient. *Id.* at 23,187. But Senators



1 Long and Church agreed that it would be far-fetched for the amendment to cover situations  
 2 in which “one seeks a sterilization procedure or an abortion, [and] it could not be performed  
 3 because there might be a nurse or an attendant somewhere in the hospital who objected to it.”  
 4 119 Cong. Rec. 9597 (1973). Pre- and post-op tasks include monitoring and ensuring that a  
 5 patient is stable and/or recovering following a procedure such as taking vitals and placing an  
 6 intravenous line — tasks that are generic to surgeries in general, not specific to abortions or  
 7 sterilization.<sup>1</sup>

8 (2) ***“Health Care Entity” For Purposes***  
 9 ***of the Coats-Snowe Amendment.***

10 The reader will recall that the Coats-Snowe Amendment protected “health care  
 11 entities” that refused to undergo or provide training for abortions against discrimination.  
 12 The Coats-Snowe Amendment defined “health care entity” as including “an individual  
 13 physician, a postgraduate physician training program, and a participant in a program of training  
 14 in the health professions,” meaning, in short, doctors, residency programs, and medical students  
 15 or residents. 42 U.S.C. 238n(c)(2). The Coats-Snowe Amendment followed a new standard by  
 16 the Accrediting Council on Graduate Medical Education “indicating that failure to provide  
 17 training for induced abortions could lead to loss of accreditation” for hospitals and training  
 18 programs. The purpose of the amendment was thus to (1) ensure medical training programs  
 19 such as schools and residencies were not required to provide abortion training in order to be  
 20 accredited, and (2) extend conscience protections to students and faculty in the context of  
 21 training for abortions as well as to extend the protection to state schools (not just religious  
 22 schools). 142 Cong. Rec. 2264–65 (1996).

23 The final rule, however, redefines “health care entity” for purposes of the Coats-Snowe  
 24 Amendment as:

25 (1) For purposes of the Coats-Snowe Amendment (42 U.S.C.  
 26 238n) and the subsections of this part implementing that law  
 27 (§ 88.3(b)), an individual physician or other *health care*

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28 <sup>1</sup> This order recognizes that the physical act of removing and disposing a fetus during and immediately following an abortion would be “assisting in its performance.” The definition proposed by HHS, however, goes well beyond such assistance and cannot be squared with the statute itself.

1           *professional, including a pharmacist; health care personnel;*  
 2           *a participant in a program of training in the health professions;*  
 3           *an applicant for training or study in the health professions; a*  
 4           *postgraduate physician training program; a hospital; a medical*  
 5           *laboratory; an entity engaging in biomedical or behavioral*  
           *research; a pharmacy; or any other health care provider or*  
           *health care facility. As applicable, components of State or*  
           local governments may be health care entities under the  
           Coats-Snowe Amendment.

6           84 Fed. Reg. 23,264 (May 21, 2019).

7           The problem with the redefinition in the rule is that it adds several new persons and  
 8           entities beyond those in the actual statute (as italicized above). To be precise, the following  
 9           did not appear in the Coats-Snowe Amendment (or its legislative history) but now surface in the  
 10          redefinition of “health care entity”:

11           health care professional, a pharmacist, health care personnel, an  
 12           applicant for training or study in the health professions, a hospital,  
 13           medical laboratory, an entity engaging in biomedical or behavioral  
           research, a pharmacy, or any other health care provider or health  
           care facility.

14          To be sure, some of these entities appeared in *other* conscience statutes. For example, the  
 15          Church Amendment protected “applicants for training or study in the health professions.”  
 16          The Church Amendment also referenced entities engaging in biomedical or behavior research,  
 17          but only as entities *that were prohibited from discriminating*. Under the final rule, however,  
 18          they have been moved to the other side of the ledger — as entities protected *from discrimination*  
 19          and, equally problematic, imported from a different statute.

20          Other additions, however, never appeared in any conscience statute. Let’s start with  
 21          pharmacists and pharmacies. The rule states that “[a] pharmacy is a health care entity,  
 22          considering the ordinary meaning of that term, because it provides pharmaceuticals and  
 23          information, which are health care items and services.” 84 Fed. Reg. 23,196 (May 21, 2019).  
 24          Nowhere in the text or legislative history of the Coats-Snowe Amendment, however, is a “health  
 25          care entity” defined as one that provides health care items and services. Rather, when it comes  
 26          to individuals (as opposed to organizations), the statute consistently includes only those  
 27          engaging in or needing to engage in the actual performance of the procedure in question or  
 28          assisting in the procedure, such as doctors and nurses.



1 physician or other health care professional, a hospital, a provider-sponsored organization, a  
 2 health maintenance organization, a health insurance plan, or any other kind of health care  
 3 facility, organization or plan.” Pub. L. No. 1154-245, Div. B., § 507(d)(2), 132 Stat. 2981, 3118  
 4 (2018). Note that this definition differed from the statutory definition of the same term in the  
 5 Coats-Snowe Amendment. The final rule, however, redefines “health care entity” for purposes  
 6 of the Weldon Amendment (and for purposes of the Affordable Care Act, discussed hereafter)  
 7 as:

8 (2) For purposes of the Weldon Amendment (e.g., Department of  
 9 Defense and Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education  
 10 Appropriations Act, 2019, and Continuing Appropriations Act,  
 11 2019, Pub. L. 115–245, Div. B., sec. 507(d), 132 Stat. 2981,  
 12 3118 (Sept. 28, 2018)), Patient Protection and Affordable Care  
 13 Act section 1553 (42 U.S.C. 18113), and to sections of this part  
 14 implementing those laws (§ 88.3(c) and (e)), an individual  
 15 physician or other health care professional, including *a*  
 16 *pharmacist; health care personnel; a participant in a program of*  
 17 *training in the health professions; an applicant for training or*  
 18 *study in the health professions; a postgraduate physician training*  
 19 *program; a hospital; a medical laboratory; an entity engaging in*  
 20 *biomedical or behavioral research; a pharmacy; a provider-*  
 21 *sponsored organization; a health maintenance organization; a*  
 22 *health insurance issuer; a health insurance plan (including group*  
 23 *or individual plans); a plan sponsor or third-party administrator;*  
 24 *or any other kind of health care organization, facility, or plan.*  
 25 As applicable, components of State or local governments may be  
 26 health care entities under the Weldon Amendment and Patient  
 27 Protection and Affordable Care Act section 1553.

28 84 Fed. Reg. 23,264 (May 21, 2019). The following individuals and organizations did not  
 appear in the Weldon Amendment (nor in its legislative history), but now appear as part of the  
 expanded definition of “health care entity” for purposes of the Weldon Amendment:

pharmacist, health care personnel, a participant in a program of  
 training in the health professions, an applicant for training or study  
 in the health professions, a postgraduate physician training  
 program, a medical laboratory, an entity engaging in biomedical  
 or behavioral research; a pharmacy, a health insurance issuer, and  
 a plan sponsor or third-party administrator.

In presenting the Amendment, Representative Weldon stated the following:

The reason I sought to include this provision in the bill is my  
 experience as a physician, and I still see patients, is that the  
 majority of nurses, technicians and doctors who claim to be  
 pro-choice who claim to support *Roe v. Wade* always say to me  
 that they would never want to participate in an abortion, perform  
 an abortion, or be affiliated with doing an abortion. This provision

1 is meant to protect health care entities from discrimination because  
2 they choose not to provide abortion services.

3 In addressing Representative Zoe Lofgren’s concern that the “sweeping new legislation”  
4 would allow “any individual physician, health care professional, hospital, HMO, health  
5 insurance plan or any other kind of health care facility, organization, or plan from providing,  
6 paying for, or even referring a patient for abortion services,” Representative Weldon stated that,  
7 “[t]his provision is intended to protect the decisions of physicians, nurses, clinics, hospitals,  
8 medical centers, and even health insurance providers from being forced by the government to  
9 provide, refer, or pay for abortions.” 150 Cong. Rec. 25,044–45 (2004).

10 As with the Coats-Snowe Amendment, the redefinition for purposes of the Weldon  
11 Amendment adds a host of individuals and organizations under “health care entities.” Some of  
12 these terms come from conscience provisions in other statutes and others do not. Regardless,  
13 none of these additions was defined or contemplated in the underlying statute. For example, a  
14 pharmacist has again been included. As Representative Weldon stated, however, the protection  
15 against discrimination was only extended to “physicians, nurses, clinics, hospitals, medical  
16 centers, and even health insurance providers.” Unlike those listed individuals and entities, a  
17 pharmacist does not play a role specific to the performance of an abortion or sterilization  
18 procedure. The addition of individuals such as pharmacists and other such organizations like  
19 pharmacies fall outside the intent of the underlying statute and the final rule is wrong to include  
20 them.

21 \* \* \*

22 The Affordable Care Act protected health care entities from discrimination in the  
23 context of assisted suicides. The ACA defined the term “health care entity” in exactly the  
24 same way as the Weldon Amendment. The same entities added in by the new rule for the  
25 Weldon Amendment was also added in for purposes of the ACA. Nonetheless, the definition  
26 of “health care entity” under the ACA presents a closer question, given the fact that the ACA  
27 applied to health care entities in the context of assisted suicides and not abortions and given  
28 that, unlike the other statutes, the ACA did delegate legislative rulemaking power to the agency.  
We can accept that a pharmacy is a “health care entity” for purposes of the ACA. Although

1 pharmacists do not play a significant role in treatment in the context of abortions and  
 2 sterilizations, they do in assisted suicides. For example, one method of assisted suicide requires  
 3 patients to ingest lethal amounts of barbitol capsules, and a pharmacist could be required to  
 4 dispense such medication and ultimately cause the patient's death. In that context, it is clear  
 5 that the pharmacist would have a role in the actual treatment of the patient. This order is thus  
 6 unable to find a clear conflict of the definition of "health care entity" for purposes of the ACA  
 7 in the challenged rule versus the definition in the ACA.

8 (4) ***"Entity."***

9 At this point, let's return briefly to the Church Amendment. Although it did not use the  
 10 term "health care entity," it did use the term "entity." It also used the term "individual." It  
 11 consistently used those terms so as to distinguish "entities" from "individuals," the former being  
 12 organizations and the latter being natural persons. This is quite evident from a simple reading of  
 13 the statute.

14 The final rule, however, merges the two. Specifically, it defines "entity" to include,  
 15 among others, "*a 'person' as defined in 1 U.S.C. 1.*" In turn, Section 1 defines "person" to  
 16 include: "corporations, companies, associations, firms, partnerships, societies, and joint stock  
 17 companies, *as well as individuals*" (emphasis added). Therefore, the rule redefines "entity" to  
 18 include "individual," exactly what the Church Amendment avoided. The new rule was wrong to  
 19 do so.

20 (5) ***"Discriminate" or "Discrimination."***

21 The final rule defines "discriminate or discrimination" to include:

22 (1) To withhold, reduce, exclude from, terminate, restrict, or make  
 23 unavailable or deny any grant, contract, subcontract, cooperative  
 24 agreement, loan, license, certification, accreditation, employment,  
 title, or other similar instrument, position, or status;

25 (2) To withhold, reduce, exclude from, terminate, restrict, or make  
 26 unavailable or deny any benefit or privilege or impose any penalty;  
 or

27 (3) To utilize any criterion, method of administration, or site  
 28 selection, including the enactment, application, or enforcement of  
 laws, regulations, policies, or procedures directly or through  
 contractual or other arrangements, that subjects individuals or  
 entities protected under this part to any adverse treatment with



1 respect to individuals, entities, or conduct protected under this part  
 2 on grounds prohibited under an applicable statute encompassed by  
 this part.

3 (4) Notwithstanding paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition,  
 4 an entity subject to *any prohibition* in this part shall not be  
 5 regarded as having engaged in discrimination against a protected  
 6 entity where the entity offers and the protected entity voluntarily  
 7 accepts an effective accommodation for the exercise of such  
 8 protected entity's protected conduct, religious beliefs, or moral  
 9 convictions. In determining whether any entity has engaged in  
 10 discriminatory action with respect to any complaint or compliance  
 review under this part, OCR will take into account the degree to  
 which an entity had implemented policies to provide effective  
 accommodations for the exercise of protected conduct, religious  
 beliefs, or moral convictions under this part and whether or not the  
 entity took any adverse action against a protected entity on the  
 basis of protected conduct, beliefs, or convictions before the  
 provision of any accommodation.

11 (5) Notwithstanding paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition,  
 12 an entity subject to *any prohibition* in this part may require a  
 13 protected entity to inform it of objections to performing, referring  
 14 for, participating in, or assisting in the performance of specific  
 15 procedures programs, research, counseling, or treatments, but only  
 16 to the extent that there is a reasonable likelihood that the protected  
 17 entity may be asked in good faith to perform, refer for, participate  
 in, or assist in the performance of, any act or conduct just  
 described. *Such inquiry may only occur after the hiring of,  
 contracting with, or awarding of a grant or benefit to a protected  
 entity, and once per calendar year thereafter, unless supported by  
 a persuasive justification.*

18 (6) The taking of steps by an entity subject to *prohibitions* in this  
 19 part to use alternate staff or methods to provide or further any  
 20 objected-to conduct identified in paragraph (5) of this definition  
 21 would not, by itself, constitute discrimination or a prohibited  
 22 referral, if such entity does not require any additional action by,  
 23 or does not take any adverse action against, the objecting protected  
 24 entity (including individuals or health care entities), and if such  
 methods do not exclude protected entities from fields of practice  
 on the basis of their protected objections. Entities subject to  
 prohibitions in this part may also inform the public of the  
 availability of alternate staff or methods to provide or further the  
 objected-to conduct, but such entity may not do so in a manner that  
 constitutes adverse or retaliatory action against an objecting entity.

25 84 Fed. Reg. 23,263 (May 21, 2019). The problematic part of the new rule is its restriction on  
 26 inquiry into conscientious objections during the hiring process (italicized above), something  
 27 none of the underlying statutes expressly barred.

28 The Church Amendment, for example, provided that certain entities could not  
 “discriminate in the employment, promotion, or termination of employment of any physician or



1 other health care personnel” or “discriminate in the extension of staff or other privileges to any  
2 physician or other health care personnel,” 42 U.S.C. § 300a-7(c), but nowhere did it expressly  
3 bar inquiry into any conscientious objections in the hiring process.

4 Plaintiffs attack the new definition because it does not include an “undue hardship”  
5 exception. To be clear, however, no federal conscience statute ever defined “discriminate” or  
6 “discrimination,” ever referred to Title VII, or itself provided any undue hardship exception.  
7 At first blush, therefore, it is a bit hard to grasp plaintiffs’ grievance.

8 Plaintiffs showcase a Florida case wherein a pro-life nurse applied for employment at a  
9 Title X health center. She applied for a position as an antepartum, laborist, postpartum, and  
10 preventative care nurse. *Hellwege v. Tampa Family Health Centers*, 103 F. Supp. 3d 1303, 1306  
11 (M.D. Fla. 2015). If the health center had not been able to inquire about any ethical objections  
12 she had to doing those jobs, it is possible she could have been staffed on an abortion procedure  
13 and only learned of her objection after she was on the job. Surely, the employer in such  
14 circumstance can ask if the applicant would have any conscience objection to doing the very  
15 job at issue. The district judge in *Hellwege* did not reach this issue, as she found the Church  
16 Amendment did not provide a private right of action. But scenarios like this could jeopardize  
17 federal funding under the challenged rule.

18 Plaintiffs are correct that Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a), provides protection for  
19 applicants of employment against discrimination based on their religious beliefs, yet provides  
20 an undue hardship exception. Specifically, Title VII defines the term “religion” to include “all  
21 aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as belief, unless an employer demonstrates  
22 that he is unable to reasonably accommodate an employee’s or prospective employee’s religious  
23 observance or practice without undue hardship on the conduct of the employer’s business.” *Id.*  
24 at § 2000e(j). The Supreme Court has held that an undue hardship is one where an  
25 accommodation would have “more than a de minimis cost.” *Trans World Airlines, Inc. v.*  
26 *Hardison*, 432 U.S. 63, 84 (1977).

27 In sum, Title VII allows an employer to inquire about religious beliefs that might impose  
28 a hardship on the employer and allows the employer to reject an applicant whose religious

1 practices cannot be reasonably accommodated. The question here is whether the Title VII  
 2 scheme should be read into the Church Amendment (and any other conscience statutes covering  
 3 applicants for employment). After hewing to the words actually used in the Church Amendment  
 4 (as plaintiffs themselves have argued), it would be ironic to veer from the actual text of the  
 5 Church Amendment and to read concepts into it from the Civil Rights Act. But it's unnecessary  
 6 to decide that point. Note well that the new rule includes an exception for "persuasive  
 7 justification," meaning pre-employment inquiries can be made and applicants rejected when  
 8 supported by a "persuasive justification." Although this term is not further defined by the rule,  
 9 this order expects that any undue hardships would supply persuasive justification. Therefore,  
 10 this order will not criticize the rule based on its definition of "discriminate" or "discrimination."

11 (6) *"Referral" or "Refer for."*

12 The final rule defines "referral" or "refer for" to include:

13 [T]he provision of information in oral, written, or electronic  
 14 form (including names, addresses, phone numbers, email or  
 15 web addresses, directions, instructions, descriptions, or other  
 16 information resources), where the purpose or reasonably  
 foreseeable outcome of provision of the information is to assist a  
 person in receiving funding or financing for, training in, obtaining,  
 or performing a particular health care service, program, activity,  
 or procedure.

17 84 Fed. Reg. 23,264 (May 21, 2019).

18 The Church Amendment only addressed the performance and assistance in the  
 19 performance of abortions, not referrals. The other conscience statutes, however, did use the  
 20 terms "referral" or "refer for." The Coats-Snowe Amendment applied to health care entities  
 21 that chose not to train "in the performance of induced abortions, to require or provide such  
 22 training, to perform such abortions, or to provide *referrals for* such training or such abortions."  
 23 42 U.S.C. §238n(a)(1) (emphasis added). The Medicaid and Medicare laws stated that  
 24 Medicaid-managed organizations and Medicare Advantage plans were not required to "provide,  
 25 reimburse for, or provide coverage of a counseling or *referral service*" if the organization  
 26 objected to the service on moral or religious grounds. 42 U.S.C. §§ 1395w-22(j)(3)(B),  
 27 1396u-2(b)(3)(B) (emphasis added). The Affordable Care Act prohibited qualified health care  
 28 plans from discriminating against "any individual health care provider or health care facility

1 because of its unwillingness to provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or *refer for* abortions.”  
 2 *Id.* at § 18023(b)(4) (emphasis added). The Weldon Amendment applied to health care entities  
 3 that do not “pay for, provide coverage of, or *refer for*” abortions. Pub. L. No. 115-245, Div. B  
 4 § 507 (d), 132 Stat. 2981, 3118 (2018) (emphasis added).

5 The term was not defined nor addressed in the legislative history of any of the conscience  
 6 statutes. However, the legislative history of at least the Weldon Amendment provided some  
 7 guidance. In explaining his purpose, Representative Weldon stated:

8 This provision is intended to protect the decisions of physicians,  
 9 nurses, clinics, hospitals, medical centers, and even health  
 10 insurance providers from being forced by the government to  
 11 provide, *refer*, or pay for abortions.

12 \* \* \*

13 This provision only applies to health care entities that refuse to  
 14 provide abortion services. Furthermore, the provision only affects  
 15 instances when a government requires that a health care entity  
 16 provide abortion services. Therefore, contrary to what has been  
 17 said, this provision will not affect access to abortion, *the provision*  
 18 *of abortion-related information* or services by willing providers or  
 19 the ability of States to fulfill Federal Medicaid legislation.

20 150 Cong. Rec. 25,044–45(2004) (emphasis added).

21 Therefore, Representative Weldon used the term “refer for” as separate from the  
 22 provision of information, and further explicitly clarified that the Amendment was not meant to  
 23 apply to the provision of abortion-related information.

24 Under the rule, however, the provision of any information by a “health care entity”  
 25 that could reasonably lead to a patient obtaining the procedure at issue would be considered a  
 26 “referral.” This means, for example, that an entity could lose all of its HHS funding if it fired a  
 27 hospital front-desk employee for refusing to tell a woman seeking an emergency abortion for an  
 28 ectopic pregnancy which floor she needed to go to for her procedure.

In justifying the need for this definition, HHS cites to *National Institute of Family and*  
*Life Advocates v. Becerra (NIFLA)*, a decision that addresses only the First Amendment  
 concerns in providing information regarding abortions to patients. 138 S. Ct. 2361 (2018).  
 Specifically in *NIFLA*, California enacted the FACT Act, which, in relevant part, required  
 licensed clinics that offered pregnancy-related services to provide a government-drafted script

1 about the availability of state-sponsored services, including abortions. *Id.* at 2371. Although the  
2 Supreme Court found such provision of information to violate the First Amendment, it did not  
3 speak to whether the government-drafted script constituted a “referral” within the meaning of  
4 any conscience statute. *Id.* at 2365.

5 Instead, as to the Weldon Amendment at least, the legislative history is more instructive  
6 in determining whether the definition in the rule is appropriate. As quoted above, Representative  
7 Weldon explicitly stated his amendment was not meant to cover the provision of abortion-related  
8 information even though the rule covers exactly such provision of information (and more).  
9 Additionally, the Weldon Amendment used the term “referral” versus the general provision of  
10 information as separate things. This distinct use indicates that “referrals” are meant to cover  
11 narrower circumstances than the general provision of information.

12 The text and legislative histories of the remaining statutes do not provide any guidance  
13 regarding how “referral” or “refer for” should be defined. The use of the terms in the medical  
14 profession, however, does provides some guidance. In particular, medical professionals use the  
15 word “referral” as a term of art that ordinarily means a request from one physician to another to  
16 assume responsibility of a patient’s specified problems. *See, e.g.*, American Academy of Family  
17 Physicians Clinical Policies (2019);<sup>2</sup> 32 C.F.R 199.2.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the informal provision of  
18 general information such as emails, names, and directions are simply recommendations. The  
19 definition of the term “referral” in the rule here thus goes beyond the meaning of the term as  
20 understood by the very industry HHS purports it is trying to protect.

### 21 3. INTERPRETIVE RULES VS. LEGISLATIVE RULES.

22 HHS claims that it has authority to promulgate a substantive, legislative rule, not a mere  
23 interpretive rule. But there is no delegation of authority, either explicit or implicit, in any of the  
24 underlying statutes to do so except in the limited instances noted above. An interpretive rule can

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25  
26 <sup>2</sup> “A referral is a request from one physician to another to assume responsibility for management of  
one or more of a patient’s specified problems.”

27  
28 <sup>3</sup> In the context of the Civilian Health and Medical Program of Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), a  
*referral* relationship exists when a CHAMPUS beneficiary is sent, directed, assigned or influenced to use a  
specific CHAMPUS-authorized provider, or a specific individual or entity eligible to be a  
CHAMPUS-authorized provider.

1 never add to or subtract from a statute itself. A legislative rule can never subtract from a statute,  
2 though one can add to it if the addition falls within the delegation authority. No rule of either  
3 type can ever conflict with the statute itself. As shown above, the new definitions conflict with  
4 the underlying statutes in significant ways.

5 **A. Explicit Rulemaking Authority.**

6 Nothing in the Church or Weldon amendments provided that HHS could promulgate  
7 rules. Furthermore, the Coats-Snowe Amendment, Affordable Care Act and Medicare and  
8 Medicaid statutes cited by defendants conferred upon HHS authority to make and publish  
9 regulations only to a limited extent. For example, Section 1302 of Title 42 of the United States  
10 Code granted the Secretary explicit authority to publish rules regarding the impact of Medicare  
11 and Medicaid on small rural hospitals. Section 18113 furthermore explicitly designated HHS to  
12 receive complaints of discrimination based on the statute prohibiting discrimination on  
13 performing assisted suicides. HHS, of course, has rulemaking authority to implement the ACA  
14 and Medicare and Medicaid programs as well as the applicable conscience provisions. 42 U.S.C.  
15 §§ 18041, 1302, 1395w–26. But HHS does not have rulemaking authority to change, add to, or  
16 subtract from conscience provisions in other statutes such as the Church and Weldon  
17 Amendments.

18 Defendants further mistakenly rely on their “housekeeping authority” to support their  
19 authority to promulgate the rule. None of the statutes cited by defendants provide HHS with the  
20 authority to promulgate substantive rules. For example, 5 U.S.C. § 301 states:

21 The head of an Executive department or military department may  
22 prescribe regulations for the government of his department, the  
23 conduct of its employees, the distribution and performance of its  
24 business, and the custody, use, and preservation of its records,  
papers, and property. This section does not authorize withholding  
information from the public or limiting the availability of records  
to the public.

25 The Supreme Court and our court of appeals has found this statute to empower an agency to  
26 create rules regarding internal procedure, practice, or organization, not substantive rules.

27 *Chrysler Corp. v. Brown*, 441 U.S. 281, 310 (1979); *Exxon Shipping Co. v. U.S. Dep’t of*  
28 *Interior*, 34 F.3d 774, 777 (9th Cir. 1994). The challenged rule is not, however, a mere

1 housekeeping rule. The expansive definitions in the rule depart from the federal statutes, as  
2 explained above, changing the rights and responsibilities of health care providers. Coupled with  
3 the addition of the termination of all HHS funding as a consequence of noncompliance, the rule  
4 is undoubtedly substantive.

5 HHS next cites Section 121(c) of Title 40 of the United States Code, which provides the  
6 General Services Administrator (GSA) with authority to promulgate the Federal Acquisition  
7 Regulation. Section 121(d) goes on to state that the GSA does not have “the authority to  
8 prescribe regulations on matters of policy applying to executive agencies.” Statements on  
9 matters of policy are generally those that explain how an agency will enforce a statute or  
10 regulation. *Nat’l Mining Ass’n v. McCarthy*, 758 F.3d 243, 251–52 (D.C. Cir. 2014).

11 HHS also invokes the Uniform Administrative Requirements (UAR). The UAR is the  
12 Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) guidance for funding instruments. In relevant part,  
13 the UAR provides agencies with the authority to ensure that federal funding programs are  
14 implemented in full accordance with federal statutory and public policy requirements. While it  
15 is true that the UAR also provides agencies with the authority to require fund recipients to  
16 comply with federal statutes and regulations, it only allows for termination of an entity’s “federal  
17 award,” which is defined as “Federal financial assistance,” in instances of noncompliance. 45  
18 C.F.R. § 75.371(c). This means failure to comply under the UAR would only allow HHS to  
19 terminate limited categories of funding such as grants, loans, and insurance. Under the new rule,  
20 however, failure to comply would allow HHS to terminate all of an entity’s funding including  
21 Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements. For California, this would mean a single instance of  
22 noncompliance could jeopardize, for example, the \$63 billion in federal funding it receives for  
23 healthcare programs for one-third of Californians. There is no federal statute, UAR or  
24 otherwise, that delegates to HHS the authority to promulgate a rule with such draconian  
25 mechanisms.



1                   **B.     Implicit Rulemaking Authority.**

2           Nor do defendants have implicit authority to promulgate the instant rule. The Supreme  
3 Court has discussed the manner in which Congress may implicitly delegate legislative authority  
4 to an agency:

5                   Congress [] may not have expressly delegated authority or  
6 responsibility to implement a particular provision or fill a  
7 particular gap. Yet it can still be apparent from the agency's  
8 *generally conferred authority and other statutory circumstances*  
that Congress would expect the agency to be able to speak with  
the force of law when it addresses ambiguity in the statute or fills  
a space in the enacted law.

9           *United States v. Mead Corp.*, 533 U.S. 218, 229 (2001) (emphasis added). In other words,  
10 Congress may implicitly authorize an agency to promulgate a legislative regulation if it is  
11 apparent from the agency's generally conferred authority and other statutory circumstances that  
12 Congress would expect the agency to be able to speak with the force of law when addressing  
13 ambiguity in a statute it administers. Such authorization may be indicated by express  
14 congressional delegation of rulemaking or adjudicative authority, or by some other indication of  
15 comparable congressional intent.

16           To show this, HHS refers back to the UAR as well as 5 U.S.C. § 301 and 40 U.S.C.  
17 § 121(c) for the collective proposition that HHS has the authority to disburse funds and  
18 to condition such funds based on compliance with federal conscience provisions. There,  
19 nonetheless, exists a disconnect between HHS's ability to condition funds based on compliance  
20 with the law versus any ability to change the law. HHS attempts to bridge that disconnect by  
21 explaining that, if HHS can and sometimes must condition funds based on compliance with the  
22 statutes it administers, "it follows from these authorizations that HHS may . . . explain its  
23 interpretation of those statutes" (*State of California*, Dkt. No. 54 at 13).

24           True, any and all agencies must interpret the statutes under their care. But if their  
25 interpretations are wrong, then a court must set them aside. This order holds that Congress  
26 has not made any express or implicit delegation of authority for HHS to issue legislative rules  
27 (excepted in limited cases already cited) and thus it has no authority to add to the requirements  
28 of the underlying statutes. This order also holds that while HHS may interpret the statutes in



1 question, those interpretations may not add to or subtract from what the statutes themselves say.  
2 This order further holds that the rule in question does exactly that by adding expansive  
3 definitions in conflict with the statutes and imposing draconian financial penalties.

4 **4. RELIEF.**

5 When a rule is invalid, “[t]he reviewing court shall — hold unlawful and set aside agency  
6 action, findings, and conclusions found to be — (A) arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion,  
7 or otherwise not in accordance with law; (B) contrary to constitutional right, power, privilege,  
8 or immunity; (C) in excess of statutory jurisdiction, authority, or limitations, or short of statutory  
9 right . . . .” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2). For the foregoing reasons, this order holds the rule is “not in  
10 accordance with law,” by reason of conflict with the underlying statutes and is in conflict with  
11 the balance struck by Congress in harmonizing protection of conscience objections vis-a-vis the  
12 uninterrupted flow of health care to Americans. When a rule is so saturated with error, as here,  
13 there is no point in trying to sever the problematic provisions. The whole rule must go.

14 HHS has requested that the relief granted, if any, be limited to the parties. This order  
15 recognizes that in the past, our court of appeals has vacated nationwide preliminary injunctions  
16 when the record only demonstrated the impact the ruling would have on plaintiffs and not on the  
17 nation as a whole or when limited relief was sufficient to provide complete relief to the  
18 plaintiffs. *See, e.g., City & Cty. of San Francisco v. Trump*, 897 F.3d 1225, 1244–45 (9th Cir.  
19 2018); *California v. Azar*, 911 F.3d 558, 582–84 (9th Cir. 2018).

20 Those cases did not, however, involve motions for summary judgment in which an entire  
21 rule was finally set aside, as here. The rule is not being enjoined or severed. It is being vacated  
22 in its entirety based on the administrative record and not on any considerations specific to the  
23 plaintiffs. Importantly, HHS does not and cannot cite to instances where a rule has been vacated  
24 in its entirety, but limited only to the parties. All of the courts that have been presented with the  
25 possibility of such a remedy have rejected it. *E.g., O.A. v. Trump*, 2019 WL 3536334, at \*29  
26 (D.D.C. Aug. 2, 2019) (Judge Randolph Moss); *Desert Survivors v. U.S. Dep’t of the Interior*,  
27 336 F. Supp. 3d 1131, 1134 (N.D. Cal. 2018). When reviewing courts have determined that a  
28 rule is facially invalid, the result is that the rule is vacated, “not that their application to the

1 individual petitioners is proscribed.” *Nat’l Mining Ass’n v. U.S. Army Corps of Eng’rs*, 145 F.3d  
 2 1399, 1409 (D.C. Cir. 1998) (quoting *Harmon v. Thornburgh*, 878 F.2d 484, 495 n.21 (D.C. Cir.  
 3 1989)); *see also Make the Rd. N.Y. v. McAleenan*, 2019 WL 4738070, at \*49 (D.D.C. Sept. 27,  
 4 2019) (Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson) (finding that relief must not just be granted to the  
 5 plaintiffs but to anyone to whom it could apply “so as to give interested parties (the plaintiff, the  
 6 agency, and the public) a meaningful opportunity to try again”).

7         Setting aside the rule just for the plaintiffs in this case would not only go against the  
 8 foregoing precedent, but would also be illogical given the fact that the APA violations found  
 9 here would apply with equal force for any other plaintiff to whom the rule could apply. A rule  
 10 cannot be vacated in its entirety on the ground that it is “not in accordance with law” for a  
 11 limited group of parties only. It can only be vacated as to all applicable parties. And limiting  
 12 relief would be especially illogical here given the fact that other courts have set aside the rule  
 13 already.<sup>4</sup>

14         In light of the fact that the rule is vacated in its entirety, this order will and need not reach  
 15 the remaining constitutional claims.

16                 **5. REQUESTS FOR JUDICIAL NOTICE, USE OF DECLARATIONS, AND**  
 17                 **MISCELLANEOUS MOTIONS.**

18         Federal Rule of Evidence 201(b) permits courts to take judicial notice of any fact “that is  
 19 not subject to reasonable dispute because it . . . can be accurately and readily determined from  
 20 sources whose accuracy cannot reasonably be questioned.” While a court may take judicial  
 21 notice of matters of public record at the motion to dismiss stage, it cannot take judicial notice of  
 22 disputed facts contained in such public records. *Khoja v. Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc.*, 899 F.3d  
 23 988, 999 (9th Cir. 2018).

24         Plaintiffs request judicial notice of the following documents: (1) the HHS Budget,  
 25 (2) the HHS Guidelines for Regulatory Impact Analysis (2016), (3) the FDA’s “Importance of  
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27                 <sup>4</sup> On November 6, 2019, the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York  
 28 vacated the rule in its entirety on a nationwide basis. *State of New York, et al. v. U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human  
 Servs.*, C 19-04676 (Dkt. No. 248).

1 Influenza Vaccination for Health Care Personnel,” (4) HHS, Office of Population Affairs,  
 2 definition of “sterilization,” (5) HHS “Factsheet, Final Conscience Regulation,” (6) White  
 3 House, Remarks by President Trump at the National Day of Prayer Service, (7) excerpts from  
 4 the congressional record from the 93rd Congress (Senate), and (8) excerpts from the  
 5 congressional record from the 109th Congress (House of Representatives). Because these  
 6 documents are appropriate subjects of judicial notice, plaintiffs’ unopposed request is **GRANTED**.  
 7 Plaintiffs’ administrative motion to request judicial notice and their request to judicially notice  
 8 the transcript of oral arguments of the *State of New York* case is also **GRANTED**. The transcript  
 9 contains clarifications and concessions regarding the scope of the text of the rule that were  
 10 relevant to this Court’s decisionmaking.

11 The government has also opposed plaintiffs’ use of declarations in their briefing.  
 12 These declarations were not relevant in the determination of the Administrative Procedures Act  
 13 claims and is thus **DENIED AS MOOT**.

14 The motions for preliminary injunction (*City and County of San Francisco* Dkt. No. 14;  
 15 *State of California* Dkt. No. 11; *County of Santa Clara* Dkt. No. 36) and the State of California’s  
 16 administrative motion for leave to exceed the page limit for their preliminary injunction motion  
 17 (Dkt. No. 12) are **DENIED AS MOOT**.


### 18 CONCLUSION

19 For the foregoing reasons, defendants’ motion to dismiss and for summary judgment is  
 20 **DENIED**. To the extent stated above, plaintiffs’ motion for summary judgment is **GRANTED**.

21 The challenged rule is set aside and shall be unenforceable. This order gives plaintiffs  
 22 substantially all the relief they seek, although it has not reached all the claims tendered.  
 23 The undersigned judge accordingly believes this action is ready for appeal, and suggests that  
 24 all sides stipulate to entry of final judgment with reservation of all issues not reached in this  
 25 order in the event of a remand.

26 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

27 Dated: November 19, 2019.

  
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 WILLIAM ALSUP  
 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE