



August 27, 2014

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**AMERICAN CIVIL
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Washington State University
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Board of Regents
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Dear Board of Regents,

We respectfully request that the Board of Regents support patients' access to a full range of best care medical services and the comprehensive medical training of health providers. To that end, we ask that the Board of Regents decline to support the financing of a new building to house Spokane Teaching Health Center (STHC) residents unless all medical training and practices at the building will be unrestricted by religious doctrine; the latter includes but is not limited to the Ethical and Religious Directives promulgated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (ERDs).

It has come to our attention that Washington State University (WSU) has entered an affiliation agreement with Providence Health & Services, Empire Health Foundation, STHC, and Riverpoint Clinic to operate the STHC as a graduate medical education consortium (GME consortium). STHC has applied for and received federal funding for six resident spots and plans to apply for funding for up to 39 additional residency positions over the next five years. The consortium will oversee these residents, as well as most of the Providence-based residency programs.

Under the affiliation agreement, WSU has agreed to be one of the parties operating STHC as a GME consortium. WSU will compensate Providence for GME faculty and, if WSU can obtain the funding, STHC residents will be housed at a clinic based on the WSU Spokane campus. We understand that at its September meeting, the Board of Regents will consider whether to allow the university to sell revenue bonds to finance construction of a building to house the residency clinic.

Significantly, the bylaws of the Spokane Teaching Health Center state that STHC *“shall not undertake any activity, nor shall it perform or permit any medical procedure, that offends the moral or ethical values or directives of Providence, including but not limited to, the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.”*

We understand that there is a shortage of physicians in eastern Washington, and commend WSU’s efforts to address this serious problem. However, these efforts must be consistent with best care medical services and comprehensive medical training, unconstrained by Catholic religious doctrine. As an institution of the State of Washington, WSU must not subsidize or support the restriction of health care on the basis of religious doctrine.

Providence is a religious health care system that refers to itself as a “ministry” and employs scripture to explain its mission and values. Providence restricts access to reproductive and end-of-life care on the basis of religious doctrine. As a Providence brochure states, Providence, as a Catholic health care organization, “require[s] adherence to all Ethical and Religious Directives as a condition of medical privileges and employment.”

Further, under the Spokane Teaching Health Center bylaws, STHC is required to abide by the ERDs. These directives forbid or severely restrict many reproductive and end-of-life health services, including contraception, vasectomies, fertility treatments, tubal ligations, abortion, Death with Dignity, and advance directives that are contrary to Catholic teachings. Adherence to the ERDs may also increase the likelihood that LGBT individuals and families will face discrimination in seeking to access health care services consistent with their medical needs.

The Washington Constitution explicitly prohibits tax dollars and public property from being used to support religion. Washington State University is a secular, public land-grant university. STHC is bound by the ERDs. Therefore if WSU assists in operating STHC, provides a public building for STHC use, or provides compensation for faculty that are forced to abide by the ERDs, WSU will be impermissibly supporting a health care system that restricts services, training, and education on the basis of religious doctrine.

WSU must ensure that its affiliation does not result in the imposition or the support of religiously based restrictions on reproductive, end-of-life, and LGBT health care services. As a public entity, WSU is subject to Washington’s state constitutional requirements strictly prohibiting state support of religious worship, exercise, or instruction as well as state laws protecting patients’ rights. Further, state law, including the Reproductive Privacy Act (Initiative 120), the Death with Dignity Act (Initiative 1000) and the Anderson-Murray Anti-Discrimination Law, supports the provision of reproductive and end-of-life health care as well as requires non-discrimination.

It is not too late to address these important problems. We urge the Board of Regents to decline to provide funding for a building to house the STHC residents unless all medical training and practices at the building will be unrestricted by religious doctrine, including but not limited to the ERDS.

We also urge the Board of Regents to take the following steps: (1) withdraw from the consortium until STHC is no longer bound by Providence's ethical or moral code or the ERDs; (2) provide a written public statement that WSU will remain secular, that no services or information provided at a WSU facility will be restricted on the basis of religious doctrine, and that WSU will not be bound by the ERDs; (3) ensure all current and future contractual agreements clarify WSU's continued secular status; and (4) ensure all current and future agreements include provisions that allow WSU to end the affiliation if religious doctrine is imposed upon WSU or the consortium.

We appreciate the dedication and commitment of the members of the Board of Regents to expanding the number of health providers in eastern Washington. However, the Board of Regents must also ensure that WSU is not sacrificing best medical care and comprehensive medical training. Further, the Board of Regents must not undermine WSU's responsibility to adhere to the Washington State Constitution and Washington state law. As leaders of WSU and as agents of the state, you have a significant responsibility to safeguard patient access to best care medical services and to ensure that public assets are not used to advance a religious mission.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Taylor
Executive Director



Leah Rutman
Policy Counsel