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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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For many decades, the Catholic Church has been a strong advocate calling for comprehensive healthcare reform. Today, I along with my brother Bishops of New Jersey, continue to support universal and affordable healthcare with special attention to the poor and the marginalized. In fact, in 2018, our hospital, St. Peter's in New Brunswick contributed \$38 million in community benefits which included \$16.7 million in charity care to people who are either uninsured or underinsured.

Legislation (S3804/A5508) is now being considered in the New Jersey legislature which eliminates the long-standing religious employers' exemption in the current law. Eliminating the religious employers' exemption would essentially force religious organizations to pay for medications, including abortion causing drugs, sterilizations and other procedures which violate our fundamental belief that all life, from conception to natural death, is sacred.

Freedom of conscience and religious liberty have been important building blocks of American society since the nation's founding. If this measure should pass many of our Catholic institutions and services will be seriously impacted. Assistance that we provide to the poor, the frail elderly, the sick and the dying, and to immigrants and their families could be at great risk.

Passage of this measure would require our Catholic parishes, Catholic schools and agencies such as Catholic Charities to offer our employees comprehensive health benefits in violation of fundamental Catholic principles. Our religious freedom, which is a basic human right, is in jeopardy and we must speak out.

I urge all of the faithful to contact their state senators today and urge them to amend the proposed legislation, S3804/A5508 to retain the established religious employers' exemption which is contained in current law.

Visit: <https://njcatholic.org/faith-in-action> to take action now.

Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen