

Foothill Church
Testimony before Congressional Forum

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Chris Lewis and I'm the Lead Pastor at Foothill Church in Glendora, California.

Foothill Church has approximately 1,000 people who attend each weekend. We are actively involved in serving our local community by helping low income public schools, raising money for victims of sex trafficking and serving in a local crisis pregnancy center. We've never waived in our Biblical conviction about the sanctity of all life and that life begins at the moment of conception and must be protected.

In May of 2014, Foothill Church, on its own initiative, asked its insurance broker to begin working with our insurance providers (Kaiser & Blue Shield) specifically to ensure that we were not covering abortions or abortifacient drugs. Our sole purpose for doing that was to ensure that we were not contradicting our deeply held beliefs about the sanctity of Life by offering insurance that, in practice, denied those beliefs. Our church's employees don't want abortion coverage and our church members don't wish their tithes and offerings contributing to abortion coverage.

In the Summer of 2014, we were pleased to find out that Kaiser Permanente had already been approved to offer such a plan by DMHC in 2012. Our insurers were willing and able to provide us with an insurance plan that met the needs of our employees and which was consistent with our religious convictions. This should have been the end of the story.

But on August 22nd, 2014, the DMHC issued an order requiring every medical plan in the state to “provide coverage of ALL terminations of pregnancies effective immediately.” There is no religious exception.

Today, because of the decision by the DHMC and the refusal of HHS to require them to follow federal law and grant religious exemptions, Foothill Church is being coerced by the State, to violate one of our most cherished beliefs and deeply held religious convictions and offer abortions in our medical plan. Jesus taught us to render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, but neither human life, nor our consciences belong to Caesar, they belong to God. The tithes and offerings of the people of Foothill Church do not belong to Caesar, they belong to God. And when Caesar and God disagree we have no choice: we must render to God what is God’s.

This illegal mandate places Foothill Church in an impossible situation. On the one hand, we have a Biblical (and now under Obamacare a legal) obligation to take care of our employees. And we want to do that. But on the other hand, California says that in fulfilling that obligation, we must cover abortions and violate one of our fundamental beliefs. If we don’t, we will face penalties of thousands per employee. We have explored alternatives, but as a single church we simply can’t take on the cost and risk of self-insuring our employees and their families.

So here we are, left in a precarious position first by the State and now by the Administration which has refused to enforce the law that should protect us.

I want to thank you for taking time to hear me today and I’m asking you to act.