IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT
No. 14-3016

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS, et al., *Plaintiffs-Appellees*, v. SYLVIA M. BURWELL, Sec'y of the U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Servs., et al., *Defendants- Appellants*.	On Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri Case No. 4:13-CV-2300

MOTION FOR LEAVE TO FILE BRIEF OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER AND NINETEEN OTHER NATIONAL, REGIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AS *AMICI CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS AND REVERSAL

Pursuant to Rule 29 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, *Amici Curiae*, the National Women's Law Center and nineteen other national, regional, state, and local organizations, respectfully request leave to file the attached Brief in Support of Defendants-Appellants.

The National Women's Law Center is a nonprofit legal advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement and protection of women's legal rights. Joining it are nineteen other national, regional, state, and local organizations dedicated to protecting and advancing women's health. This case involves a challenge to regulations promulgated under the Patient Protection and Affordable

Care Act, which require that certain health insurance plans provide coverage of preventive services for women, including contraceptive services, with no cost-sharing requirements. *Amici* have a strong interest in the disposition of this case, which will determine the fate of the subject regulations in this Circuit and have a significant impact on the legal rights of women whose interests *Amici* serve. *See* Fed. R. App. P. 29(b). *Amici* contacted the parties to obtain consent to file the attached brief, and Defendants-Appellants consented. Plaintiffs-Appellees did not respond to our request for consent to file an amicus brief on behalf of the National Women's Law Center and other organizations with similar interests in support of the Government in this consolidated appeal.

The attached brief will assist the Court in determining whether the regulations at issue survive the challenge brought under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. As organizations that specialize in studying and advocating issues related to women, including women's health, *Amici* are uniquely situated to provide the Court with information helpful for the resolution of this case beyond the specific perspectives provided by counsel for the parties. *See Ryan* v. *Commodity Futures Trading Comm'n*, 125 F.3d 1062, 1063 (7th Cir. 1997) ("An amicus brief should normally be allowed . . . when the amicus has unique information or perspective that can help the court beyond the help that the lawyers for the parties are able to provide."); *United States* v. *Michigan*, 940 F.2d 143, 165-

66 (6th Cir. 1991) (accepting participation of amicus curiae where amicus offered information that was "timely, useful, or otherwise necessary to the administration of justice"); *cf. O'Brien* v. *U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs.*, No. 12-3357 (8th Cir. Jan. 14, 2013) (granting the National Women's Law Center's motion for leave to appear as *amicus curiae* and file its proposed brief).

Specifically, the proposed brief provides information and context not found in the parties' briefs with respect to the Government's compelling interests in women's health and promoting women's equal opportunity, and to the question of whether the regulations at issue are the least restrictive means of furthering those compelling interests. Because resolution of these issues is central to this case, *Amici* submit that the proposed brief is both "desirable" and "relevant" to its disposition. Fed. R. App. P. 29(b)(2); *see also Neonatology Assocs., P.A.* v. *Comm'r of Internal Revenue*, 293 F.3d 128, 132 (3d Cir. 2002) ("The criterion of desirability set out in Rule 29(b)(2) is open-ended, but a broad reading is prudent."). The Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal have accepted similar briefs from *Amici* in numerous other cases addressing substantially the same legal questions at issue here. *See*, *e.g.*, *Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* v. *Sebelius*, No. 13-354 (U.S. Jan. 28, 2014); *Beckwith Elec. Co., Inc.* v. *Sebelius*, No. 13-13879 (11th Cir. Oct. 28, 2013); *Gilardi* v. *U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs.*, No. 13-5069 (D.C. Cir. June 14, 2013); *Autocam Corp.* v. *Sebelius*, No. 12-2673 (6th Cir. Mar.

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21, 2013); *Korte* v. *U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs.*, No. 12-3841 (7th Cir. Mar. 8, 2013); *O'Brien* v. *U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs.*, No. 12-3357 (8th Cir. Jan. 16, 2013).

Accordingly, *Amici* respectfully requests leave to file the attached Brief of the National Women's Law Center and Nineteen Other National, Regional, State, and Local Organizations as *Amici Curiae* in Support of Defendants-Appellants.

Dated: October 28, 2014 Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this 28th day of October, 2014, I electronically filed the foregoing Motion for Leave to File Brief of the National Women's Law Center and Nineteen Other National, Regional, State, and Local Organizations, as *Amici Curiae* in Support of Defendants-Appellees and Reversal with the Clerk of the Court for the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit by using the CM/ECF system. I certify that all participants in the case are registered CM/ECF users and that service will be accomplished by the CM/ECF system.

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IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS AND CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF ST. LOUIS

Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

SYLVIA M. BURWELL, IN HER OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS SECRETARY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, et al.

Defendants-Appellants.

ON APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI, EASTERN DIVISION, NO. 4:13-cv-02300 (HON. JOHN A. ROSS)

BRIEF OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER AND NINETEEN OTHER NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS AS *AMICI CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS AND REVERSAL

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CORPORATE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Pursuant to Rule 26.1 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, the undersigned counsel for National Women's Law Center hereby certifies the following with respect to National Women's Law Center; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); Black Women's Health Imperative; Feminist Majority Foundation; Ibis Reproductive Health; Legal Momentum; NARAL Pro-Choice America; NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota; NARAL Pro-Choice Missouri; NARAL Pro-Choice South Dakota; National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association; National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health; National Partnership for Women & Families; National Women's Health Network; Planned Parenthood of the Heartland; Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri; Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota; Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri; Population Connection; and Service Employees International Union (SEIU):

1. Does the organization have any parent corporation?

   No.

2. Does any publically held corporation own 10% of the organization's stock?

   N/A.

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INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE

The National Women's Law Center; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); Black Women's Health Imperative; Feminist Majority Foundation; Ibis Reproductive Health; Legal Momentum; NARAL Pro-Choice America; NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota; NARAL Pro-Choice Missouri; NARAL Pro-Choice South Dakota; National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association; National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health; National Partnership for Women & Families; National Women's Health Network; Planned Parenthood of the Heartland; Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri; Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota; Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri; Population Connection; and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) are national, regional, and state organizations committed to protecting and advancing women's health, with a particular interest in ensuring that women receive the full benefits of access to no-cost contraceptive coverage as intended by the Affordable Care Act.[1]

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Contraceptives are a key component of preventive health care for women. To further the goals of bettering the health and welfare of all Americans,

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[1] Pursuant to Fed. R. App. P. 29(c)(5), the undersigned counsel certify that no party's counsel authored this brief in whole or in part; no party or party's counsel, or any other person, other than amici or their counsel, contributed money that was intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief.

the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act ("ACA") and implementing regulations require all new insurance plans to cover all Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") approved contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, and patient education and counseling, without cost-sharing ("the contraception regulations" or "regulations"). Health Res. & Servs. Admin., U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Servs., *Women's Preventive Services Guidelines*, http://www.hrsa.gov/womensguidelines (last visited Oct. 27, 2014); *see also* 42 U.S.C. § 300gg-13(a)(4); 45 C.F.R. § 147.130 (2014).

The regulations exempt certain religious employers from this requirement. *See Women's Preventive Services Guidelines*. The regulations also accommodate non-profit entities that hold themselves out as religious and have religious objections to some or all forms of contraception (the "accommodation"). *See* 45 C.F.R. § 147.131 (2014). Under the accommodation, a non-profit entity may certify via a Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS") form that it meets the eligibility criteria for the accommodation and share a copy of that form with its insurance issuer or third-party administrator. *Id.* Or, it may simply inform HHS of its objection in writing, stating "the basis on which it qualifies for an accommodation" and provide HHS with its insurance plan name and type and the name and contact information for the plan's third party administrators and health insurance issuers. *See* Coverage of Certain Preventative Services Under the

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Affordable Care Act, 79 Fed. Reg. 51092, 51094-95 (Aug. 27, 2014) (to be codified at 45 C.F.R. § 147).[2] In either case, the organization's insurance issuer or third party administrator will then be required to provide payments for contraceptive services separate from the group health insurance policy.[3] 45 C.F.R. § 147.131 (2014). Any eligible organization that acts in accord with the accommodation is not required to provide contraceptive coverage to its employees.

The Plaintiffs in this case, Archdiocese of St. Louis and Catholic Charities of St. Louis, qualify for either the exemption or the accommodation for non-profit entities. Yet, despite the fact that they are not required to cover contraceptive services in their group health insurance plans, Plaintiffs claim that the regulations violate their rights under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act ("RFRA").[4] RFRA provides that the Government "shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion" unless the burden "(1) is in furtherance of a

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[2] In *Wheaton College* v. *Burwell*, 134 S. Ct. 2806, 2807 (2014), the Supreme Court enjoined HHS from requiring that Wheaton, an eligible non-profit organization, send the certification form directly to its third party insurer or third party administrator and stated that Wheaton was required only to inform HHS in writing that "it is a non-profit organization that holds itself out as religious and has religious objections to providing coverage for contraceptive services." HHS subsequently released the new interim final regulations cited above, allowing all eligible non-profit organizations to object in writing directly to HHS rather than submit the certification form to their insurer. Plaintiffs continue to object to the accommodation in spite of the new regulations.

[3] However, administrators of "church plans" are exempt from this requirement. *See* 29 U.S.C. § 103(b)(2) (exempting church plans from regulation under ERISA).

[4] Both Plaintiffs object to all forms of contraception and sterilization as contrary to Catholic doctrine and object to the accommodation on that basis. Compl. ¶ 4.

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compelling governmental interest; and (2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest." 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-1.

This Court should find that Plaintiffs' RFRA claims fail. The contraception regulations impose no substantial burden on Plaintiffs' religious exercise. Therefore, this Court need not reach the additional questions of whether the regulations further compelling governmental interests and use the least restrictive means to advance those interests.

But if the Court were to reach those questions, it should hold, as *amici* demonstrate below: First, that the contraception regulations serve the Government's compelling interests in protecting women's health and furthering women's equal opportunity. And second, that none of Plaintiffs' proposed alternatives to the contraception regulations can be considered a less restrictive means of furthering the Government's compelling interests.

In *Hobby Lobby*, the Court identified the accommodation as a less restrictive means of furthering the Government's compelling interests because it "ensur[ed] that the employees of these entities have *precisely the same access* to all FDA-approved contraceptives as employees of companies whose owners have no religious objection to providing such coverage." *Burwell* v. *Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 134 S. Ct. 2751, 2759 (2014) (emphasis added). By contrast, each of Plaintiffs' proposed alternatives in this case would force their female employees

and the female dependents of their employees into a separate system of care delivery or payment for their contraceptive health needs. By imposing additional financial, administrative, and logistical burdens on these women, Plaintiffs' alternatives ensure that the affected women would *not* have precisely the same access to contraceptive care as women working for non-objecting employers, who would be able to access no-cost birth control alongside their other health care needs from their regular provider and insurance plan. To the contrary, Plaintiffs' alternatives would put the affected women in a worse position and make it less likely that they would be able to obtain the best form of contraception for them. Leaving the affected women with lesser, more difficult, and more costly contraceptive access is not the result approved by the Court in *Hobby Lobby*. Rather, it is a result that threatens women's health and equality and thus undercuts the Government's efforts to achieve its compelling interests.

For these reasons, none of the alternatives proposed by the Plaintiffs can be considered a less restrictive method of forwarding the Government's compelling interests, and the Court should deny Plaintiffs' requested relief.

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ARGUMENT

I. THE CONTRACEPTION REGULATIONS FURTHER THE COMPELLING GOVERNMENTAL INTERESTS OF IMPROVING WOMEN'S HEALTH AND EQUALITY.

If the Court finds that the contraception regulations substantially burden Plaintiffs' exercise of religion, Plaintiffs' claims should still fail because the contraception regulations are carefully drawn to further the Government's compelling interests: promoting women's health and furthering women's equality. As the Centers for Disease Control explained when it named "family planning" one of ten great public health achievements of the twentieth century, alongside vaccinations and control of infectious diseases:

> Access to family planning and contraceptive services has altered social and economic roles of women. Family planning has provided health benefits such as smaller family size and longer interval[s] between the birth of children; increased opportunities for preconceptional counseling and screening; fewer infant, child, and maternal deaths; and the use of barrier contraceptives to prevent pregnancy and transmission of human immunodeficiency virus and other STDs.

Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *Ten Great Public Health Achievements–United States, 1900-1999*, 48 Morbidity & Mortality Wkly. Rep. 241-43 (1999), *available at* http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00056796.htm ("*Ten Great Public Health Achievements*").

A. The Contraception Regulations Forward the Compelling Governmental Interest of Protecting Women's Health.

As Justice Kennedy emphasized in his *Hobby Lobby* concurrence, "[i]t is important to confirm that a premise of the Court's opinion is its assumption that the HHS regulation here at issue furthers a legitimate and compelling interest in the health of female employees." *Hobby Lobby*, 134 S. Ct. at 2786 (Kennedy, J., concurring); *see also id.* at 2799 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting) ("[T]he Government has shown that the contraceptive coverage for which the ACA provides furthers compelling interests in public health and women's well being."). Indeed, the lower court in this case held that the Government's interests in promoting public health and gender equality are compelling, noting that "[t]here is no question that promoting public health and gender equality are of 'tremendous societal significance.'" *Archdiocese of St. Louis* v. *Burwell*, No. 4:13-CV-2300-JAR, 2014 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 88918, at *14 (E.D. Mo. June 30, 2014) (quoting *Conestoga Wood Specialities Corp.* v. *Secretary of U.D. Dept. of Health and Human Servs.*, 724 F.3d 377, 412 (3d Cir. 2013), *rev'd sub nom. Burwell* v. *Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 134 S. Ct. 2751 (2014)).

Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States each year are unintended (*i.e.*, unwanted or mistimed at the time of conception). *See* Finer & Zolna, *Unintended Pregnancy in the United States: Incidence and Disparities, 2006*, 84 Contraception 478, 480 (2011). Because unintended pregnancy is

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associated with a wide range of negative health consequences for women and any resulting children, HHS has deemed the goal of reducing the proportion of pregnancies that are unintended a national objective. *See* U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Servs., *Healthy People 2020: Family Planning*, https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/family-planning (last visited Oct. 27, 2014) ("*Healthy People 2020*").

Many studies document the negative health consequences of unintended pregnancy. For example, during an unintended pregnancy, a woman is more likely to receive delayed or no prenatal care, to be depressed, and to suffer from domestic violence. *See* Inst. Of Med., *Clinical Preventive Services for Women: Closing the Gaps* 90 (2011), *available at* http://www.iom.edu/reports/2011/clinical-preventive-services-for-women-closing-the-gaps.aspx (last visited Oct. 27, 2014) ("IOM Rep"); *see also Healthy People 2020* (describing the above and additional risks of unintended pregnancy). An unintended pregnancy may also cause the child or the children resulting from the pregnancy to suffer negative health consequences. Without contraception, women are more likely to have short inter-pregnancy intervals, which are associated with preterm birth, low birth weight, and small-for-gestational-age births. *See* IOM Rep at 90. As they grow, children born of unintended pregnancies are likely to be in poorer physical health than children of planned pregnancies, may be less likely to

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succeed in school, and may be more likely to struggle with behavioral issues during their teen years. *See* Logan et al., *The Consequences Of Unintended Childbearing: A White Paper*, at 5-7 (Child Trends, Inc. ed., 2007).

While unintended pregnancy is highly prevalent in the United States—significantly more so than in comparably-developed countries[5]—this need not be the case. *See* IOM Rep. at 91-92. Contraception is highly effective in preventing unintended pregnancy. For example, intrauterine devices (IUDs), female sterilization, and contraceptive implants have a failure rate at 1% or less in the first 12 months—as compared with an 85% chance of pregnancy within 12 months with no contraception. *See id.*

Moreover, some women rely on contraception to avoid pregnancy due to other medical conditions. For example, it may be advisable for women with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and obesity, to postpone pregnancy until their health stabilizes. *See id*. at 90. Contraception can also have independent health benefits, including treating menstrual disorders; reducing risks of endometrial cancer; protecting against pelvic inflammatory disease; and, potentially, preventing ovarian cancer. *See id.* at 92.

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[5] For example, "[w]hile 49% of pregnancies in the United States are unintended, the corresponding percentage in France is only 33%, and in Edinburgh, Scotland, it is only 28%." James Trussell & L.L. Wynn, *Reducing Unintended Pregnancy in the United States*, 77 Contraception 1, 4 (2008).

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For all of these reasons, increasing access to contraception is a matter of public health. And the health of Plaintiffs' female employees and the employees' female dependents is directly at stake in these cases.

B. The Contraception Regulations Forward the Compelling Governmental Interest of Promoting Equal Opportunity for Women.

Eliminating gender discrimination and promoting women's equality are compelling state interests. *Bd. of Dirs. of Rotary Int'l* v. *Rotary Club of Duarte*, 481 U.S. 537, 549 (1987); *Roberts* v. *U.S. Jaycees*, 468 U.S. 609, 626 (1984). The Supreme Court has specifically recognized "the importance, both to the individual and to society, of removing the barriers to economic advancement and political and social integration that have historically plagued certain disadvantaged groups, including women," and has thus found that "[a]ssuring women equal access to . . . goods, privileges, and advantages clearly furthers compelling state interests." *U.S. Jaycees* at 626; *see also id.* at 623; *United States* v. *Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515, 532 (1996) (noting that fundamental principles are violated when "women, simply because they are women" are denied the "equal opportunity to aspire, achieve, participate in and contribute to society based on their individual talents and capacities").

Congress passed the provision that led to the contraception regulations to help alleviate the "punitive practices of insurance companies that charge women

more and give [them] less in a benefit" and to "end the punitive practices of the private insurance companies in their gender discrimination." 155 Cong. Rec. 28,842 (2009) (statement of Sen. Mikulski); *see also id.* at 28,846 (statement of Sen. Dodd) ("I support the effort by Senator Mikulski on her efforts to see to it that women are treated equally, and particularly in preventive care.").[6] In enacting that provision, Congress recognized that the failure to cover women's preventive health services meant that women paid more in out-of-pocket costs than men for basic and necessary preventive care or were simply unable to obtain preventive care at all because of high cost barriers:

> Women must shoulder the worst of the health care crisis, including *outrageous discriminatory practices in care and coverage*. Not only do we pay more for the coverage we seek . . . but. . . . [i]n America today, too many women are delaying or skipping preventive care because of the costs of copays and limited access. In fact, more than half of women delay or avoid preventive care because of its cost. *This fundamental inequity in the current system is dangerous and discriminatory and we must act*.

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[6] Prior to the reforms made possible by the ACA, women paid substantially more to access basic health care than did men and were significantly more likely to be burdened with high medical costs. Women of childbearing age spent 68% more in out-of-pocket health care costs than men. Rachel Benson Gold, *The Need for and Cost of Mandating Private Insurance Coverage of Contraception*, 1 Guttmacher Rep. on Pub. Pol'y 5 (Aug. 1998); *see also* IOM Rep. at 18-19 (noting that "women are consistently more likely than men to report a wide range of cost-related barriers to receiving or delaying medical tests and treatments and to filling prescriptions for themselves and their families"); Elizabeth M. Patchias & Judy Waxman, The Commonwealth Fund, *Women and Health Coverage: The Affordability Gap* 4 (Apr. 2007), *available at* http://www.commonwealthfund.org/usr_doc/1020_Patchias_women_hlt_coverage_affordability_gap.pdf (noting that 9% of men but 16% of women in a 2005-06 survey were "underinsured").

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Id. at 28,844 (statement of Sen. Gillibrand) (emphases added).

When insurance covers basic preventive health care for men without requiring an out-of-pocket payment, but requires women to draw upon their personal savings for their basic preventive care, this discriminates on the basis of sex. Moreover, when effective contraception is not used, and unintended pregnancy results, it is women who incur the attendant physical burdens and medical risks of pregnancy, women who disproportionately bear the health care costs of pregnancy and childbirth, and women who often face barriers to employment and educational opportunities as a result of pregnancy.

As the Supreme Court has recognized, "[t]he ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives." *Planned Parenthood of Se. Pa.* v. *Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 856 (1992). Indeed, a majority of women report the ability to better control their lives as a very important reason for using birth control. Frost & Lindberg, Guttmacher Inst., *Reasons for Using Contraception: Perspectives of US Women Seeking Care at Specialized Family Planning Clinics*, 87 Contraception 465, 467 (2013). For example, increased control over reproductive decisions provides women with educational and professional opportunities that have advanced gender equality over the decades since birth control's effectiveness has improved and access to birth control has expanded. In fact, "[e]conomic analyses

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have found clear associations between the availability and diffusion of oral contraceptives, particularly among young women, and increases in U.S. women's education, labor force participation, and average earnings, coupled with a narrowing in the wage gap between women and men." *Id.* at 465. Another study concludes that the advent of oral contraceptives contributed to an increase in the number of women employed in professional occupations, including as doctors and lawyers. *See* Goldin & Katz, *The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions*, 110 J. Pol. Econ. 730, 758-62 (2002). And in a study that specifically asked women why they use contraceptives, a "majority of women reported that, over the course of their lives, access to contraception had enabled them to better take care of themselves or their families, support themselves financially, complete their education, or get or keep a job. . . ." Sonfield, *What Women Already Know*, 16 Guttmacher Pol'y Rev. 8, 8 (Winter 2013).

In enacting the provision that led to the contraception regulations, Congress understood that covering women's preventive health services without cost-sharing alongside other preventive services in existing employer-based insurance would be "a huge step forward for justice and equality in our country." 155 Cong. Rec. 28,869 (2009) (statement of Sen. Franken).

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C. The Contraception Regulations Further the Government's Compelling Interests By Eliminating Barriers to Contraception.

Eliminating barriers to access to contraception, including up-front costs, is essential to achieving the compelling interests in protecting women's health and equal opportunity. Studies show that the high costs of contraception lead women to forego contraception completely, to choose less effective contraception methods, or to use contraception inconsistently or incorrectly. *See, e.g.*, Guttmacher Inst., *A Real-Time Look at the Impact of the Recession on Women's Family Planning and Pregnancy Decisions* 5 (Sept. 2009), *available at* http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/RecessionFP.pdf (finding that, to save money, women forewent contraception, skipped birth control pills, delayed filling prescriptions, went off the pill for at least a month, or purchased fewer birth control packs at once). Oral contraception costs women, on average, $2,630 over five years. James Trussell et al., *Cost Effectiveness of Contraceptives in the United States*, 80 Contraception 229, 299 (2009). Other hormonal contraceptives—including injectable contraceptives, transdermal patches, and the vaginal ring—cost women between $2,300 and $2,800 over a five-year period. *Id.* Moreover, some of the most highly effective methods of birth control carry large up-front costs. For example, the up-front costs of the IUD can be as much as $1000. *See* Planned Parenthood Fed'n of Am., *IUD*,

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http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/iud-4245.htm (last visited Oct. 27, 2014).

Evidence and practical experience show that eliminating barriers to contraception access and providing education and counseling about the available methods can greatly reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancy. For example, one study found a "clinically and statistically significant reduction" in unintended pregnancies when at-risk women received contraceptive counseling and reversible contraceptive methods of their choice at no cost. Peipert et al., *Preventing Unintended Pregnancies by Providing No-Cost Contraception*, 120 Obstetrics & Gynecology 1291, 1291 (2012).

By requiring health insurance plans to include coverage of the full range of FDA-approved methods without co-payments or cost-sharing of any kind, the contraception regulations ensure that each woman can choose the contraceptive method that fits her needs "depending upon [her] life stage, sexual practices, and health status," IOM Rep. at 91, and guarantee that she can obtain her contraception through the same providers and systems from which she otherwise obtains health care, thus reducing barriers to access. *See* 45 C.F.R. § 147.130(a)(1)(iv) (2014). Moreover, by covering patient education and counseling, the regulations help ensure that each woman has the information she needs to identify the form of contraception that is most appropriate for her. *See id.* In so doing, the regulations

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substantially further the Government's compelling interests in women's health and equality.

II. PLAINTIFFS' PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES ARE INSUFFICIENT AND IMPRACTICAL AND WOULD HARM THE WOMEN FORCED TO RELY UPON THEM.

In *Hobby Lobby*, the Supreme Court held that the accommodation was a less restrictive means of achieving the Government's compelling interests in protecting women's health than mandating that an employer provide coverage because:

> "Under the accommodation, the plaintiffs' female employees would continue to receive contraceptive coverage without cost sharing for all FDA-approved contraceptives, and they would continue to face minimal logistical and administrative obstacles, because their employers' insurers [are] responsible for providing information and coverage."

134 S. Ct. at 2782 (citations omitted) (internal quotation marks omitted); *see also id*. at 2786 (Kennedy, J., concurring) (the accommodation is an "existing, recognized, workable, and already-implemented framework to provide [insurance] coverage" of birth control to women who work for employers seeking exemptions from the contraception regulations). Specifically, the Supreme Court reasoned that the accommodation guarantees that employees of objecting entities "have *precisely the same access* to all FDA-approved contraceptives as employees of companies whose owners have no religious objections to providing such coverage." *Id.* at 2759 (emphasis added). The Court held that the accommodation

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"constitutes an alternative that achieves all of the Government's aims." *Id.*[7] The Court, in reaching this conclusion, emphasized that there is "no reason why this accommodation would fail to protect the asserted needs of women as effectively as the [contraception regulations]." *Id.* at 2782. It was significant to the Court's calculus that females who work for objecting companies would not be put in a worse position than women working for non-objecting employers. *Id.* at 2759.

All of Plaintiffs' proposed alternatives, by contrast, would require women who access their health care through the insurance plan of an objecting employer—and only those women—to navigate a difficult, distinct process in order to obtain preventive contraceptive care without cost-sharing. Specifically, Plaintiffs' proposals range from tax credits and deductions, to compelling "manufacturers or distributors of contraceptives to provide them for free or at reduced rates," to expanding Medicaid or other existing programs. Pl.'s Opp. to Mot. to Dismiss 30-36. These proposals would deny women health insurance coverage of contraception without cost-sharing and within the same system of care and coverage in which they address their other health needs.

By separating women's reproductive health care from all of the other health care needs addressed by their existing employer-based insurance plan,

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[7] In so holding, the Court also emphasized: "The effect of the HHS-created accommodation on the women employed by Hobby Lobby and the other companies involved in these cases would be ***precisely zero***." *Hobby Lobby*, 134 S. Ct. at 2760 (emphasis added).

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Plaintiffs' alternatives would make it more difficult for affected women to access basic preventive medicine. Indeed, Plaintiffs' proposals would require affected women to take on significant personal costs—monetary and otherwise—just to access care fundamental to women's health. As such, none of the proposed alternatives meet the needs of women "as effectively" as the contraception regulations. *See Hobby Lobby*, 134 S. Ct. at 2782 (noting that the accommodation does so). Therefore, none can be considered a less restrictive means of achieving the Government's compelling interests in women's health—including the health of Plaintiffs' employees and their eligible dependents—and promoting equal opportunity for women.

In evaluating whether proposed alternatives constitute a less restrictive means of achieving the Government's compelling interests, the question for the Court is whether "the state can be assured its interest will be attained if [challengers'] religious beliefs are accommodated" via their proposed alternatives. *Murphy* v. *Arkansas*, 852 F.2d 1039, 1043 (8th Cir. 1988).[8] If proposed alternatives are "impractical" or "insufficient" to advance the Government's compelling interests, the Government's existing regulatory scheme must prevail. *See United States* v. *Lafley*, 656 F.3d 936, 942 (9th Cir. 2011) (holding that

[8] While *Murphy* involved a challenge under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, the case reflects the pre-*Smith* standard Congress enshrined in RFRA. *See City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507, 515 (1997) (Congress's "stated purpose" in passing RFRA was to "restore the compelling interest test").

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prohibition of marijuana use as a condition of supervised release does not violate RFRA).

Moreover, the analysis does not require the Government to "do the impossible"—that is, it need not "refute each and every conceivable alternative regulation scheme." *United States* v. *Wilgus*, 638 F.3d 1274, 1289 (10th Cir. 2011); *see also May* v. *Baldwin*, 109 F.3d 557, 564-65 (9th Cir. 1997) (calling on the government only to "identif[y] the failings in the alternatives" proposed by the plaintiff); *Hamilton* v. *Schriro*, 74 F.3d 1545, 1556 (8th Cir. 1995) (noting that requiring the government to "refute every conceivable option" would impose a "herculean burden" on the government and calling on the plaintiff to "demonstrate what, if any, less restrictive means remain unexplored"). Rather, the Government must "support its choice of regulation [and] refute the alternative schemes offered by the challenger." *Wilgus*, 638 F.3d at 1289. Thus, the judicial inquiry is a limited one—RFRA "is not an open-ended invitation to the judicial imagination." *Id.*

Each of Plaintiffs' proposed alternatives would have the effect of undermining the Government's efforts to protect women's health and promote equal opportunity for women by eliminating barriers to contraception.[9] The

[9] This is so even assuming Plaintiffs' proposals were enacted into law. However, each of Plaintiffs' proposals would require congressional action prior to taking effect. Prior to such action, Plaintiff Catholic Charities' female employees and the employees' female dependents

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barriers to contraceptive access imposed by each of Plaintiffs' proposals in comparison to the accommodation refute the possibility that they may be considered less restrictive alternatives of achieving the Government's compelling interests.

Plaintiffs' suggestion that the Government offer a tax credit or deduction based on the costs of contraception would require women to pay up front for their contraceptive needs. It would thus reinstate the very cost barriers that can deter women from obtaining the most effective methods or prevent women from using contraception altogether. In addition, it would require women to take on the administrative burden of collecting documentation of their contraceptive costs over the course of the year and substantiating these costs in their tax returns. Finally, for those women who will not owe taxes at the end of the year, the proposal might offer no benefit at all.[10]

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would only have access to contraception via the options available to them prior to the enactment of the ACA. *See* Def.'s Mot. to Dismiss 25 (noting that Plaintiffs identified no existing statutory authority for their proposed alternatives).

[10] Whether an individual must file a federal income tax return depends on her gross income, filing status, age, and whether she is a dependent. *See* Internal Revenue Serv., Publ'n 501, *Exemptions, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information* 3 (2013), *available at* http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p501.pdf. If the tax credit were nonrefundable, women who did not make sufficient income to file taxes would not receive the tax credit at all. If the tax credit were refundable, it would provide women with the opportunity to recover the costs of their contraception, but only after filing a tax return that they otherwise would not have had to file. *Compare* 26 U.S.C. § 32 (creating a refundable earned income credit), *with* 26 U.S.C. § 23 (establishing a nonrefundable adoption expense credit).

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Plaintiffs' suggestion that the Government compel providers or distributors of contraceptives to provide their products for free or at subsidized rates would not guarantee women the ability to access the specific method of contraception they need—or the ability to access any method at all without cost-sharing. Moreover, even if a woman were able to obtain the particular contraceptive method she needs from a distributor at no cost, this program would impose logistical and administrative burdens on her—she would need to locate the distributor and would likely need to prove her eligibility while working for an employer who presumably objects to any method of certification that would allow her to receive contraceptive care.

Plaintiffs' suggestion that the "Government could simply extend contraception coverage through the Medicaid program to women whose employers do not provide the required coverage[]" is equally flawed. Pl. Opp. to Mot. to Dismiss 32. First, Plaintiffs' suggestion would require women to take on the significant administrative burden of enrolling in an entirely separate insurance system. Enrollment would likely require proof of eligibility on the basis that the enrollee lacks contraceptive access through an insurance plan offered by an objecting employer. There is no reason to believe that Plaintiffs would be any more amenable to verifying enrollees' claims under these circumstances—and thus empowering women to obtain the contraceptive care—than Plaintiffs are willing to

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certify their religious objections to the Government in accord with the accommodation.

After enrolling, many women would need to take the additional step of locating a new contraceptive provider who accepts Medicaid.[11] And those women willing to take on that task might be unsuccessful. Each Medicaid program has its own limited set of providers, and those providers may be inaccessible to women living in certain areas. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1396a (giving states' broad discretion in designing Medicaid programs). Even if women were able to locate a local Medicaid provider, the traditional Medicaid program does not guarantee that every method of contraceptive will be covered for every eligible person.[12] Rather, each state decides for itself which contraceptives it will cover.[13] As a result, female

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[11] Private providers that accept employer-sponsored insurance coverage do not necessarily accept Medicaid. According to a 2014 study, about 46 percent of physicians accept Medicaid, a 10% drop from 2010. See John Tozzi, *Losing Patience, and Patients, with Medicaid*, Bloomberg Businessweek (Apr. 10, 2014), http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-04-10/doctors-shun-patients-who-pay-with-medicaid (last visited Oct. 27, 2014).

[12] *See* Cntrs. for Medicare & Medicaid Servs., *The State Medicaid Manual* 4-270, http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Paper-Based-Manuals-Items/CMS021927.html (last visited Oct. 27, 2014) ("[States] are free to determine the specific services and supplies which will be covered as Medicaid family planning services so long as those services are sufficient in amount, duration and scope to reasonably achieve their purpose.").

[13] *See id.* While the Medicaid expansion population receives coverage for the full range of FDA-approved contraceptives without cost-sharing, expanding Medicaid is optional for states, and 23 states have chosen not to expand Medicaid. *See* Cntrs. for Medicare & Medicaid Servs., *State Medicaid and CHIP Eligibility Standards*, *available at* http://www.medicaid.gov/AffordableCareAct/Medicaid-Moving-Forward-2014/Downloads/Medicaid-and-CHIP-Eligibility-Levels-Table.pdf. Existing Medicaid beneficiaries in non-expansion states are not entitled to preventative services under the ACA.

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employees provided with Medicaid coverage might still lack coverage for the form of contraception most appropriate for their individual circumstances.

Finally, Plaintiffs' proposal would require the Government to develop an entirely new administrative system to determine eligibility for participation in the program and reimbursement, especially in the growing number of states that rely on managed care plans.[14] In addition, because Medicaid is a joint state-federal program, the viability of Plaintiffs' Medicaid proposal would depend upon the ability of the federal government to require states to participate in and contribute financially to the implementation of the Medicaid expansion. But the Supreme Court already held in *National Federation of Independent Business* v. *Sebelius* that the federal government cannot require state participation in a new Medicaid program. *See* 132 S. Ct. 2566, 2607 (2012) ("What Congress is not free to do is to penalize States that choose not to participate in [a] new program by taking away their existing Medicaid funding."). And even if every state volunteered its

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See Sara E. Wilensky and Elizabeth A. Gray, *Existing Medicaid Beneficiaries Left Off The Affordable Care Act's Prevention Bandwagon*, 32 Health Affairs 1188, 1188-89 (2013).

[14] Traditionally, states used a fee-for-service system to provide Medicaid benefits to their residents. In the past 15 years, more and more states have implemented a managed care delivery system, in which people get most or all of their Medicaid services from an organization under contract with the state. As of 2014, about 50 million people receive Medicaid benefits through some form of managed care. See Cntrs. for Medicare & Medicaid Servs., *Managed Care*, http://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid-chip-program-information/by-topics/delivery-systems/managed-care/managed-care-site.html(last visited Oct. 27, 2014); Michael Sparer, Robert Wood Johnson Found., *Medicaid Managed Care: Costs, Access, and Quality of Care*, Research Synthesis Report No. 23 (September 2012), *available at* http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2012/rwjf401106.

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participation, the fact remains that Plaintiffs would be asking the federal government *and the state* to pay for their religious exercise.[15]

Similarly, Plaintiffs' suggestion that the Government expand an existing program such as Title X is also not a workable alternative and would fall short of ensuring that the affected women have the same seamless access to contraception without cost-sharing as women who benefit from the contraception regulations.

First, like Plaintiffs' proposal to expand Medicaid, Plaintiffs' suggestion that women could rely on an expanded Title X program would require many women to take on the burden of locating a new provider just for contraceptive service, losing the benefit provided by continuity of care with her preferred doctor.[16] Additionally, as with Medicaid providers, women may have difficulty locating a Title X-funded provider within a reasonable distance.[17] Women working at the objecting employers are scattered across fifty states, living

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[15] See Cntrs. for Medicare & Medicaid Servs., *Financing and Reimbursement*, http://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid-chip-program-information/by-topics/financing-and-reimbursement/financing-and-reimbursement.html (last visited Oct. 27, 2014).

[16] Title X is a federal grant program overseen by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Population Affairs dedicated to providing low-income individuals with family planning and related preventive health services. *See* Office of Population Affairs, *Title X Family Planning*, http://www.hhs.gov/opa/title-x-family-planning/ (last visited Oct. 27, 2014). Grantees include state, county, and local health departments, community health centers, Planned Parenthood Centers, and private nonprofits. *Id.*

[17] In fact, approximately one in four U.S. counties does not have a Title X-funded provider. *See* U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Servs., *Fact Sheet: Title X Family Planning Program* (Jan. 2008), *available at* http://www.hhs.gov/opa/pdfs/title-x-family-planning-fact-sheet.pdf.

in both rural and urban areas, with various health and financial needs. Requiring that these women receive their contraceptive care only from a Title X-funded provider could force them to travel long distances just to receive contraceptive care, potentially leading them to forgo such care completely.

Second, Title X does not provide "free" contraceptives to all women. Rather, Title X-funded providers offer no-cost family planning and related preventive health services only to women whose income is below the federal poverty level. 42 C.F.R. § 59.5(a)(7) (2014) (providing that, in general, "no charge will be made for services provided to any persons from a low-income family"); 42 C.F.R. § 59.2 (2014) (defining a low-income family as "a family whose annual income does not exceed 100 percent of the most recent Poverty Guidelines").[18] Women from families with annual incomes of up to 250 percent of the federal Poverty Guidelines may purchase services from Title X-funded providers on a sliding scale based on their ability to pay.[19] *See* 42 CFR § 59.5(a)(8) (2014). Above that income level, women pay "the reasonable cost of providing services." *Id.*

Finally, like Medicaid providers, Title X-funded providers may not be able to offer every contraceptive product to their client populations—while Title

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[18] $19,790 is the 2014 Poverty Guideline for a family of three in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. 79 Fed. Reg. 3593 (Jan. 22, 2014).

[19] In 2014, 250 percent of the Poverty Guideline for a family of three in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia is $49,475. *See id.*

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X-funded providers offer a "broad range" of contraceptive methods, every method is not guaranteed at every Title X-funded provider. *See generally* Office of Population Affairs, *Program Requirements for Title X Funded Family Planning Projects* (Apr. 2014), *available at* http://www.nationalfamilyplanning.org/document.doc?id=1462.[20]

A few examples demonstrate the impact Plaintiffs' proposals would have on the affected women, and make inescapably clear the defects in those proposals that render them inadequate means of achieving the Government's compelling interests.

Take, for example, a woman who determines in consultation with her provider that she would like a tubal ligation immediately after giving birth—a not uncommon scenario. Under the current health insurance system, that woman would get the care she needs in a seamless system, from her health care provider, ensuring that her care is integrated both during and after her pregnancy. But under an expanded Title X program, the woman would most likely not be able to obtain a sterilization immediately after giving birth, since her hospital or other birth setting

[20] In addition, Title X is perpetually underfunded and overburdened. *See* NARAL Pro-Choice Am., *Title X:The Nation's Cornerstone Family-Planning Program* (Jan. 2010), *available at* http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/assets/files/birth-control-family-planning-titlex-cornerstone.pdf (noting that Title X is significantly underfunded compared to the fiscal year 1980 funding level on an inflation-adjusted basis even while the Title X caseload has grown).

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may not be Title-X funded.[21] If her hospital is not Title X-funded, Plaintiffs' proposal would force her into a dual system, requiring her to postpone her procedure, to transfer her records, and to follow-up with two different providers—all while recovering from a birth and managing the needs of a newborn infant.

Or take the example of a low-wage worker seeking to avoid unintended pregnancy by getting an IUD, one of the most effective forms of contraception, but also one of the most expensive. *See, e.g.,* IOM Rep. at 105 (noting that IUDs have a failure rate of 1% or less in the first twelve months); Planned Parenthood Fed'n of Am., *IUD*, http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/iud-4245.htm (last visited Oct. 27, 2014) (noting that insertion of an IUD and related follow-up visits can cost as much as $1000). For a woman in a low-wage job, the up-front cost of the IUD could be nearly a month's salary.[22] Yet Plaintiffs would suggest that she pay that amount up front, and seek reimbursement the following calendar year through a tax credit or deduction. Even assuming that the full cost of the IUD

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[21] In 2010, fewer than 200 hospitals across the United States received Title X grants. Jennifer J. Frost et al., Guttmacher Inst., *Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2010*, at 15 (2013), *available at* http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/win/contraceptive-needs-2010.pdf. As of the same year, there were no Title X-funded hospitals in 24 states. *Id.* at 36-37.

[22] The federal minimum wage is $7.25 an hour. 29 U.S.C. § 206(a)(1). A woman who works 40 hours a week at the minimum wage earns $290 per week, or $1,160 per month, before taxes and deductions. *See also* Brief of the Guttmacher Institute and Professor Sara Rosenbaum as Amici Curiae in Support of the Government at 17 n.37, *Burwell* v. *Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 134 S. Ct. 2751 (2014).

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would ultimately be reimbursed this way—which might not be the case, depending on her income tax liability—the up-front costs may be prohibitive, eliminating the IUD as an option for her. Plaintiffs' proposal would put this woman in the very position she was in before the ACA and the contraception regulations took effect—allowing cost to dictate whether she is able to use the method of contraception that is best for her and most effective in preventing unwanted pregnancy.

In summary, all of Plaintiffs' proposals have serious flaws that render them impractical or insufficient to advance the Government's compelling interests. They would most likely require the affected women to find new providers and disrupt the continuity of care; could require them to shoulder the upfront costs for contraception and related education and counseling; and/or would not guarantee availability of the full range of contraceptive methods, with or without out-of-pocket cost. In addition, women could be required to complete a series of burdensome administrative requirements in order to demonstrate eligibility to participate in any such program proposed by Plaintiffs, which represent a further obstacle to gaining access to contraceptives without out-of-pocket cost. In other words, Plaintiffs' proposals would impose significant costs, administrative burdens, and logistical obstacles on Plaintiffs' female employees and their covered family members, resulting in real harm to the affected women and rendering these

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alternatives less effective than the accommodation in forwarding the Government's compelling interests.

None of the alternatives would accomplish what the contraception regulations guarantee: seamless access to the full range of contraceptive methods and counseling without cost-sharing and within the existing employer-based insurance framework.

Moreover, each proposal seeks to deny women a part of their compensation from their employer—health insurance coverage of a basic preventive health care service that ninety-nine percent of sexually active women use at least one point in their lives[23]—while men with the same exact health insurance plan would not experience a similar carve out of their basic preventive health care needs. By introducing sex discrimination into health insurance packages, the proposals directly conflict with the Government's compelling interest in advancing equal opportunity for women.

Because these proposals would have a detrimental effect on the Plaintiffs' female employees and covered family members, they do not leave these women with the same access as other women working for non-objecting employers, and do not meet their needs as effectively as the contraception regulations. Therefore, they cannot be justified by *Hobby Lobby*. *See Hobby*

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[23] Guttmacher Inst., *Contraceptive Use in the United States* (June 2014), http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_contr_use.html (last visited Oct. 27, 2014).

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Lobby, 134 S. Ct. at 2759. Plaintiffs' proposals would undermine the Government's compelling interests in promoting women's health and equality, and they must be rejected.

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CONCLUSION

For all of the foregoing reasons, this Court should reverse the District Court's rulings.

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Respectfully submitted,

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This brief complies with the type-volume limitation of Fed. R. App. P. 32(a)(7)(B) and 29(d) because it contains 6,956 words, excluding the parts of the brief exempted by Fed. R. App. P. 32(a)(7)(B)(iii).

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I hereby certify that on this 28th day of October, 2014, I electronically filed the foregoing *amicus curiae* brief with the Clerk of the Court for the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit by using the CM/ECF system. I certify that all participants in the case are registered CM/ECF users and that service will be accomplished by the CM/ECF system.

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