

SAMPLE LETTER – RELIGIOUS-SECULAR HEALTH SYSTEM AFFILIATIONS

Dear _____

I have become aware that [insert health facility/system or public hospital district] is [seeking an affiliation partner/ or has announced plans to affiliate with [insert Catholic health system]], and am deeply concerned about the impact the proposed affiliation may have on access to health care services in my community. [Insert health facility/system] serves residents in [insert counties], and these residents should not be denied best care medical services because such services conflict with religious doctrine. [Add description of the reasons for your personal interest in this issue.]

Catholic health systems are required to follow the Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs) promulgated by the United States Conference of Bishops. These directives forbid 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. Facilities that affiliate with Catholic health systems are often required to restrict health services and information on the basis of religious doctrine. For example, when the previously secular Swedish Medical Center in Seattle affiliated with the religious Providence Health & Services, it stopped allowing elective abortions at Swedish facilities; and now that the previously secular Harrison Medical Center in Bremerton has affiliated with the religious Franciscan Health System, doctors at Harrison are no longer able to prescribe medications to assist with Death with Dignity.

Health facilities provide an essential public service, supported in part by tax dollars. Denying patients access to medical services and information because of religious doctrine goes against our state's strong protections under the Washington Constitution and voter-approved laws that protect reproductive freedom, end-of-life choices, and LGBT rights.

We urge [insert health facility/system or public hospital district] to reconsider the affiliation. If you decide to move forward, please ensure: (1) the execution of an official written public statement that your facility/health system will remain secular, that no services or information will be restricted on the basis of religious doctrine, and that your health facility/system will not be bound by the ERDs or the Statement of Common Values (another document that restricts services on the basis of religious doctrine); (2) all agreements and contracts with the religious health system clearly state your continued secular status and uphold all representations made in your public statement; and (3) include an exit strategy in your contract that allows your facility/system to end the affiliation if religious doctrine is imposed to restrict health care.

I recognize the pressures on [insert health facility/system or public hospital district] to increase efficiencies in the provision of health care services. However, achieving this goal should not come at the expense of a community's access to medical services and information. Thank you for considering these concerns.

Sincerely,