



**Testimony on WAC 246-869-010
Board of Pharmacy
March 29, 2007**

Madame Chair and members of the Board, my name is Sister Sharon Park and I am the Executive Director of the Washington State Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of the State of Washington on issues of public policy.

Today, I would like to focus on one component of the proposed rule that you have before you, namely, that of conscience. I realize that you have attempted to address this issue by using the word “pharmacies” instead of pharmacists. However, I have strong concerns that adopting the proposed WAC with its present wording may place a pharmacist in the untenable situation of violating her or his conscience.

All people have an obligation to form their consciences and then to follow them. An individual’s conscience is the faculty by which one discerns what is right from what is wrong, and cooperation in what one considers an immoral act cannot be justified by invoking respect for the freedom of others. Even when civil law permits—or even requires it.

While the broad principles we affirm come from a “faith based” foundation, the rights we assert are grounded in this country’s secular constitutional tradition. Both the US Constitution and the Washington State Constitution recognize the free exercise of religion as a fundamental right.

Even as the state seeks to balance individual rights in a way that best secures the freedom of all, the state and its entities must protect a person from compulsion to act in ways that contradict his or her religious and moral values.

It may be true that no civil right is completely unlimited. Our ability to act must account for the rights of others. But it is one thing to limit behavior. It is quite another thing to compel it.

Individuals do not lose their civil right to exercise their conscience once they enter the healthcare professions. In order to fully protect pharmacists, this civil right must extend to pharmacists who may have to dispense a drug to which they conscientiously object.

Some suggest that once a doctor has written a prescription it is not the place of the pharmacist to object. But our occupation, our work, does not define our morality. Rather, our moral code defines how we approach our occupation. A person’s religious and moral conviction does not make them less qualified to provide health care; rather it is a priceless source of social integrity and responsibility.

Legal recognition of the civil rights of pharmacists in no way infringes on the rights of patients. Patients have a right to receive health care services, but not a right to force any particular individual to provide them.

Forcing people to choose between conscience and adherence to civil law is not the American way. We believe that people can live together in a pluralistic society. Thus, we have a tradition and a body of constitutional law that have protected the right to act in accord with one’s conscience.

We ask that you respect the religious freedom established by our founders and not force individuals to violate their consciences.