

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF ALBANY

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE DIOCESE OF ALBANY;
THE SERVANTS OF RELIEF FOR INCURABLE CANCER;
TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH; OUR LADY OF
CONSOLATION GERIATRIC CARE CENTER; DELTA
DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN NEW YORK, INC.; ST.
JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH; CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF
THE DIOCESE OF OGDENSBURG; BISHOP LUDDEN HIGH
SCHOOL; FIRST BIBLE BAPTIST CHURCH; CARMELITE
SISTERS FOR THE AGED AND INFIRM, INC.,

Index No. 8229-02

Lamont, J.

Plaintiffs,

-against-

GREGORY V. SERIO, SUPERINTENDENT, NEW YORK
STATE DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE,

Defendant.

**BRIEF FOR *AMICI CURIAE* NEW YORK CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION AND
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION IN OPPOSITION TO PLAINTIFFS' MOTION
FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION AND IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDANT'S CROSS-
MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES.....	iii
INTEREST OF <i>AMICI CURIAE</i>	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
ARGUMENT	
I. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE PLAINTIFFS’ FREE EXERCISE RIGHTS UNDER THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.....	5
II. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE OF THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.....	9
A. The Constitution Permits Laws to Distinguish Between the Religious and the Secular.....	9
B. The Administration of the Exemption Will Not Impermissibly Entangle the State with Religion.....	13
C. The Act Does Not Impermissibly Discriminate Among Religions.....	15
1. The Act does not impermissibly discriminate against religious denominations that oppose contraception.....	15
2. The religious employer exemption does not render the Act discriminatory.....	17
III. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE NEW YORK CONSTITUTION.....	20
A. The Act Does Not Violate Plaintiffs’ Free Exercise Rights Under the New York Constitution.....	20
1. The Act’s burden on Plaintiffs’ free exercise rights is insufficient to sustain a successful free exercise claim.....	22
2. Cognizable state interests are not limited to the narrowest definition of “peace or safety”.....	24
3. The Act legitimately prevents Plaintiffs’ from imposing their religious beliefs on	

third parties.....26

B. The Act Does Not Violate the “Preference Clause” of Article I, Section 3 of the New York Constitution.....28

IV. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE FEDERAL OR STATE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF EXPRESSION OR ASSOCIATION.....29

1. The Act Does Not Implicate Expressive Conduct..... 29

2. The Act Does Not Implicate Associational Rights..... 32

V. PLAINTIFFS DO NOT MAKE OUT A “HYBRID RIGHTS” CLAIM..... 33

CONCLUSION.....34

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CASES	PAGES
<i>Aboud v. Detroit Board of Education</i> , 431 U.S. 209 (1977)	31, 32
<i>Adams v. Commisioner of Internal Revenue</i> , 170 F.3d 173 (3d Cir. 1999).....	18, 24
<i>Agostini v. Felton</i> , 521 U.S. 203 (1997)	10
<i>Al-Amin v. City of New York</i> , 979 F. Supp. 168 (E.D.N.Y.1997).....	30
<i>American Friends Service Committee Corporation v. Thornburgh</i> , 951 F.2d 957 (9th Cir. 1991)	4
<i>Blackwelder v. Safnauer</i> , 689 F. Supp. 106 (N.D.N.Y. 1988).....	27
<i>Bob Jones University v. United States</i> , 461 U.S. 574 (1983)	16
<i>Bollard v. California Province of the Society of Jesus</i> , 196 F.3d 940 (9th Cir. 1999)	13
<i>Bowen v. Kendrick</i> , 487 U.S. 589 (1988)	10, 11, 16
<i>Boy Scouts of America v. Dale</i> , 530 U.S. 640 (2000).....	32, 33
<i>Bradfield v. Roberts</i> , 175 U.S. 291 (1899)	10
<i>Cantwell v. Connecticut</i> , 310 U.S. 296 (1943)	12
<i>Catholic High School Association v. Culvert</i> , 753 F.2d 1161 (2d Cir. 1985).....	6
<i>Catholic Charaties v. Superior Court</i> , 109 Cal. Rptr. 2d 176, (Ct. App. 2001)	17
<i>Children’s Healthcare is a Legal Duty, Inc. v. De Parle</i> , 212 F.3d 1084 (8th Cir. 2000)	20
<i>Church of Scientology Flag Service Organization, Inc. v. City of Clearwater</i> , 2 F.3d 1514 (11th Cir. 1993)	19
<i>Corporation of the Presiding Bishop v. Amos</i> , 483 U.S. 327 (1987)	7, 8, 14
<i>DeMarco v. Holy Cross High School</i> , 4 F.3d 166 (2d Cir. 1993)	6
<i>Dole v. Shenandoah Baptist Church</i> , 899 F.2d 1389 (4th Cir. 1990).....	4, 17

<i>Ellis v. Brotherhood of Railway</i> , 466 U.S. 435 (1984)	31
<i>Employment Division v. Smith</i> , 494 U.S. 872 (1990)	<i>passim</i>
<i>EEOC v. Catholic University of America</i> , 83 F.3d 455 (D.C. Cir. 1996).....	12
<i>EEOC v. First Baptist Church</i> , 59 Fair Empl. Prac. Cas. (BNA) 517 (N.D. Ind. 1992)	4
<i>EEOC v. Fremont Christian School</i> , 781 F.2d 1362 (9th Cir. 1986)	4
<i>EEOC v. Pacific Press Publishing Association</i> , 676 F.2d 1272 (9th Cir. 1982)	4
<i>EEOC v. Tree of Life Christian Schools</i> , 751 F. Supp. 700 (S.D. Ohio 1990)	4, 16
<i>Espinosa v. Rusk</i> , 634 F.2d 477 (10th Cir. 1980)	12
<i>First Covenant Church v. City of Seattle</i> , 840 P.2d 174 (Wash. 1992).....	8
<i>Forsyth County v. Nationalist Movement</i> , 505 U.S. 123 (1992).....	12
<i>Frazer v. Illinois Department of Employment Security</i> , 489 U.S. 829 (1989)	10-11
<i>Gay Rights Coalition of Georgetown University Law Center v.</i> <i>Georgetown University</i> , 536 A.2d 1 (D.C. 1987)	31
<i>Germenis v. Coughlin</i> , 232 A.D.2d 738 (3d Dep't 1996)	29
<i>Gillette v. United States</i> , 401 U.S. 437 (1971).....	16
<i>Glickman v. Wielman Brothers & Elliott, Inc.</i> , 521 U.S. 457 (1997)	30
<i>Goehring v. Brophy</i> , 94 F.3d 1294 (9th Cir. 1996).....	23
<i>Golden v. Clark</i> , 76 N.Y.2d 618 (1990)	32, 33
<i>Graham v. Commissioner</i> , 822 F.2d 844 (9th Cir. 1987)	16
<i>Grove v. Mead School District No. 354</i> , 753 F.2d 1528 (9th Cir. 1985)	23
<i>Harris v. McRae</i> , 448 U.S. 297 (1980)	16
<i>Hill-Murray Federation of Teachers v. Hill-Murray High School</i> , 487 N.W.2d 857 (Minn. 1992).....	25

<i>Hunt v. McNair</i> , 413 U.S. 734 (1973).....	13
<i>In re Sampson</i> , 37 A.D.2d 668 (3d Dep’t 1971).....	27
<i>Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace v. INS</i> , 910 F.2d 42 (2d Cir. 1990).....	4, 6
<i>KDM v. Reedsport School District</i> , 196 F.3d 1046 (9th Cir. 1999)	8
<i>Keller v. State Bar of California</i> , 496 U.S. 1 (1990)	32
<i>Kissinger v. Board of Trustees of the Ohio State University</i> , 5 F.3d 177 (6th Cir. 1993)	34
<i>Knights of Columbus, Council v. Town of Lexington</i> , 272 F.3d 25 (1st Cir. 2001).....	9
<i>Kong v. De Parle</i> , 2001 WL 1464549 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 13 2001)	20
<i>Larson v. Valente</i> , 456 U.S. 228 (1982)	19
<i>LaRocca v. Lane</i> , 37 N.Y.2d 575 (1975)	20, 25
<i>Leebaert v. Harrington</i> , 332 F.3d 134 (2d Cir. 2003)	34
<i>Lewis v. Allen</i> , 11 A.D.2d 447 (3d Dep’t 1960)	29
<i>Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah</i> , 508 U.S. 520 (1993).....	8, 9, 19
<i>Matter of Faith Bible Church v. Hudacs</i> , 179 A.D.2d 308 (3d Dep’t 1992)	24
<i>McGowan v. Maryland</i> , 366 U.S. 420 (1961).....	16
<i>Miller v. Reed</i> , 176 F.3d 1202 (9th Cir. 1999).....	33
<i>Munns v. Martin</i> , 930 P.2d 318 (Wash. 1997)	26
<i>New York State Employment Relations Board v. Christ the King Regional High School</i> , 90 N.Y.2d 244 (1997)	5, 6, 34
<i>Open Door Baptist Church v. Clark County</i> , 995 P.2d 33 (Wash. 2000).....	26
<i>Ortiz v. New York City Housing Authority</i> , 22 F. Supp. 2d 15 (E.D.N.Y. 1998)	18
<i>Ortiz-Sandoval v. Gomez</i> , 81 F.3d 891 (9th Cir. 1996)	18
<i>People v. Barber</i> , 289 N.Y. 378 (1943).....	20

<i>People ex rel. DeMauro v. Gavin</i> , 92 N.Y.2d 963 (1998)	21
<i>People v. Hollman</i> , 68 N.Y.2d 202 (1986)	29, 30
<i>People v. Pierson</i> , 176 N.Y. 201 (1903)	25
<i>People v. Woodruff</i> , 26 A.D.2d 236 (2d Dep’t 1966)	20, 21, 25,
<i>Rector, Wardens, & Members v. City of New York</i> , 914 F.2d 348 (2d Cir. 1990).....	5
<i>Roberts v. United States Jaycees</i> , 468 U.S. 609 (1984).....	32
<i>Roemer v. Board of Public Works</i> , 426 U.S. 736 (1976)	13
<i>Rourke v. New York State Department of Correctional Services</i> , 201 A.D.2d 179 (3d Dep’t 1994)	21
<i>Salvation Army v. Department of Community Affairs</i> , 919 F.2d 183 (3d Cir. 1990).....	4
<i>Sherbert v. Verner</i> , 374 U.S. 398 (1963)	21, 22
<i>Sheridan Road Baptist Church v. Department of Education</i> , 396 N.W. 2d 373 (Mich. 1986).....	4
<i>Shuttlesworth v. City of Birmingham</i> , 394 U.S. 147 (1969)	12
<i>Silver v. Rochester Savings Bank</i> , 73 A.D.2d 81 (4th Dep’t 1980)	18
<i>Sisters of Saint Joseph v. City of New York</i> , 49 N.Y.2d 429 (1980).....	24
<i>State v. Balzer</i> , 954 P.2d 931 (Wash. Ct. App. 1998).....	25
<i>State v. Bishop</i> , 113 N.M. 732 (N.M. Ct. App. 1992)	18
<i>Strawser v. Exxon Company U.S.A.</i> , 843 P.2d 613 (Wyo. 1992)	18
<i>Texas v. Johnson</i> , 491 U.S. 397 (1989)	30
<i>Tilton v. Richardson</i> , 403 U.S. 672 (1971)	10, 13, 14
<i>Tony & Susan Alamo Foundation v. Secretary of Labor</i> , 471 U.S. 290 (1985).....	4
<i>United States Department of Labor v. Shenandoah Baptist Church</i> , 707 F. Supp. 1450 (W.D. Va. 1989)	4

<i>United States v. Lee</i> , 455 U.S. 252 (1982).....	4, 6, 24, 27
<i>United States v. United Foods</i> , 533 U.S. 405 (2001).....	30-31
<i>Walsh v. St. Mary’s Church</i> , 248 A.D.2d 792 (3d Dep’t 1998).....	6
<i>Ware v. Valley Stream High School District</i> , 75 N.Y.2d 114 (1989)	23
<i>Watson v. Jones</i> , 80 U.S. 679 (1872).....	12
<i>West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette</i> , 319 U.S. 624 (1943).....	32
<i>Williams v. Bright</i> , 230 A.D.2d 548 (1st Dep’t 1997)	25, 26, 27
<i>Wisconsin v. Yoder</i> , 406 U.S. 205 (1972)	27, 28, 29
<i>Wooley v. Maynard</i> , 430 U.S. 705 (1977)	32
<i>Zalewska v. County of Sullivan</i> , 316 F.3d 314 (2d Cir. 2003)	29, 30, 31, 32

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS

26 U.S.C. § 6033(a)(2).....	14
Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 20-826(Z), (AA)(3) (West 2003)	6
Cal. Health & Safety § 1367.25(b) (West Supp. 2001)	6
Cal. Rules of Court 976 (d).....	18
Ga. Code Ann. § 33-24-59.6 (1999)	6
Iowa Code Ann. § 514C.19 (West 2001).....	6
Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 24-A, § 2756 (West 2001)	6
N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 415:18-I (West 2003).....	6
N.C. Gen Stat. § 58-3-178 (West 2003).....	6
Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 8, § 4099c (1993).....	6
Wash. Admin. Code § 284-43-822 (West 2003)	6
N.Y. Const. art. I § 3.....	24, 28
N.Y. Ins. Law § 4303(cc).....	1, 20

N.Y. Ins. Law § 3221(1)16)..... 1, 2, 20

OTHER AUTHORITIES

John Witte, Jr., *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Religion in the American Constitutional Experiment*, 71 Notre Dame L. Rev. 372, 390-92 (1996)..... 28

Michael W. McConnell, *The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion*, 103 Harv. Law Rev. 1409 (1990) 28

INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) is the New York State affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The NYCLU, which has approximately 30,000 members, has long been devoted to protecting the fundamental rights and values embodied in the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution and in their counterpart provisions in the New York Constitution. The ACLU, a nationwide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than 400,000 members, is dedicated to defending the guarantees of liberty and equality embodied in the state and federal constitutions. The ACLU and the NYCLU have a long history of vigorously defending religious liberty, both through litigation and advocacy, and have been equally vigilant in their efforts to safeguard reproductive rights. This history makes the ACLU and the NYCLU well positioned to assist the Court in its consideration of this case.

INTRODUCTION

The Women’s Health and Wellness Act [hereinafter WHWA or the Act] is a comprehensive anti-discrimination and public health statute that requires insurance plans to cover women’s preventive health needs equitably. Among its other requirements, which include mandating coverage for mammograms, cervical cancer screenings, and osteoporosis tests, WHWA requires insurance plans that include prescription drug benefits to cover contraceptive drugs and devices. N.Y. Ins. Law §§ 3221(l)(16), 4303(cc) (Consol. 2003). The Legislature enacted the contraceptive coverage mandate to combat discrimination in prescription plans and to promote public health.

The mandate exempts “religious employers.” Its terms are carefully crafted to balance religious liberty and the important health and equality interests furthered by the

contraceptive equity requirement. To fall within the exemption, an employer must satisfy all of the following four criteria:

- (i) The inculcation of religious values is the purpose of the entity.
- (ii) The entity primarily employs persons who share the religious tenets of the entity.
- (iii) The entity serves primarily persons who share the religious tenets of the entity.
- (iv) The entity is a nonprofit organization as described in Section 6033(a)(2)(A)i or iii, of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended.

Ins. Law § 3221(l)(16)(A)(1).

In essence, New York has exempted from the Act's requirements pervasively sectarian organizations – churches, temples, and mosques – that fulfill primarily spiritual missions. Employees at these institutions, which are primarily engaged in worship and religious instruction, are most likely to share their employer's religious tenets. In contrast, religiously affiliated entities, be they health care facilities, domestic violence shelters, or economic development corporations, that provide secular services to the general public and employ workers of various faiths are not exempt from the Act. If those entities decide to purchase health plans with prescription drug benefits, they may not impose their religious views on their diverse workforce by denying contraceptive coverage.

New York's contraceptive equity requirement is not unusual, and certainly not unconstitutional, in drawing a line between spiritual and secular aspects of a religious institution. The courts regularly distinguish core liturgical institutions from religiously affiliated hospitals, schools, charities, and other social services agencies in assessing constitutional claims. This line-drawing reflects the unremarkable constitutional principle that a religious organization's relationship with the government differs

depending on whether it provides spiritual care to its congregation or furnishes secular services to the public.

When churches conduct worship or provide religious instruction to their faithful, they have the greatest constitutional autonomy from the state (and, correspondingly, the strongest constitutional barriers against receiving public benefits). In contrast, when religious organizations create agencies that enter the secular world, and offer the public secular services, such as health care, they are increasingly subject to public rules. Government oversight of religiously affiliated nonprofits, particularly their relationships with their consumers and employees, is familiar and constitutionally permissible.

Plaintiffs are the paradigm of organizations that are not exempt from state labor policy. They are ten organizations that provide “social, human, educational and health care services to the general public.” Compl. ¶ 50. Their employees predominantly do not share their faith. Their primary function is the provision of social, educational and health care services to people of all faiths – and people who adhere to no faith – in New York’s pluralistic population. They are tax-exempt nonprofit organizations, many of which operate in connection with government programs and receive government funds. Plaintiffs plainly do not qualify for an exemption; they do not satisfy the Act’s criteria. Compl. ¶ 50. Their sister churches plainly do qualify.

Plaintiffs claim that because they oppose contraception on religious grounds, the federal and state constitutions protect their right to obstruct their employees’ access to contraception. In essence, they argue that their religious affiliation entitles them to a zone of autonomy beyond the reach of any law at odds with their religious tenets. But neither free exercise nor establishment clause principles entitle Plaintiffs to an exemption

from the provisions of WHWA. Courts have ordered religiously affiliated nonprofit organizations – notwithstanding contrary church tenets – to grant male and female employees equal benefits,¹ and to comply with boarding house regulations,² teacher certification and curricular standards for religious schools,³ immigration laws,⁴ minimum wage laws,⁵ and social security laws.⁶ As these cases make clear, religious liberty is not the absolute right to disregard the rights of others in a democratic society.

Like the arguments presented to those courts, Plaintiffs' arguments here must fail. First, because WHWA is a neutral and generally applicable law that is in no way directed at prohibiting the exercise of religion, it does not violate the federal Free Exercise Clause. The fact that the Legislature elected to include a limited religious exemption does not alter that conclusion. Second, WHWA readily survives scrutiny under the federal Establishment Clause: The Act's distinction between the secular and the religious is familiar and constitutional. The administration of its exemption does not impermissibly entangle the state with religion. And neither the text nor the legislative history of the Act

¹ See *United States Dep't of Labor v. Shenandoah Baptist Church*, 707 F. Supp. 1450 (W.D. Va. 1989), *aff'd sub nom. Dole v. Shenandoah Baptist Church*, 899 F.2d 1389 (4th Cir. 1990); *EEOC v. Fremont Christian Sch.*, 781 F.2d 1362 (9th Cir. 1986); *EEOC v. Pacific Press Publ'g Ass'n*, 676 F.2d 1272 (9th Cir. 1982); *EEOC v. Tree of Life Christian Sch.*, 751 F. Supp. 700 (S.D. Ohio 1990); *EEOC v. First Baptist Church*, 59 Fair Empl. Prac. Cas. (BNA) 517 (N.D. Ind. 1992).

² *Salvation Army v. Dep't of Cmty. Affairs*, 919 F.2d 183 (3d Cir. 1990).

³ *Sheridan Rd. Baptist Church v. Dep't of Educ.*, 396 N.W.2d 373 (Mich. 1986).

⁴ *American Friends Serv. Comm. Corp. v. Thornburgh*, 951 F.2d 957 (9th Cir. 1991); *Intercommunity Ctr. for Justice & Peace v. INS*, 910 F.2d 42 (2d Cir. 1990).

⁵ *Tony & Susan Alamo Found. v. Sec'y of Labor*, 471 U.S. 290 (1985).

⁶ *United States v. Lee*, 455 U.S. 252 (1982).

supports Plaintiffs' contention that it discriminates among religions. Finally, Plaintiffs' state constitutional claims, as well as their sundry expression and association claims, are groundless.

I. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE PLAINTIFFS' FREE EXERCISE RIGHTS UNDER THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.

A state acts constitutionally when it promulgates generally applicable laws that are not aimed at regulating religiously motivated conduct, even when those laws incidentally affect such conduct. Under this principle, courts have time and again rejected free exercise challenges to generally applicable laws regulating, for example, conditions of employment, tax obligations, and social security benefits. WHWA is among these neutral, generally applicable, and constitutional laws.

In *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990), the United States Supreme Court held that a neutral law of general applicability does not offend the federal Free Exercise Clause even if its effect is to limit religious conduct. “[I]f prohibiting the exercise of religion . . . is not the object of the [law] but merely the incidental effect of a generally applicable and otherwise valid provision, the First Amendment has not been offended.” *Id.* at 878; *see also Rector, Wardens, & Members v. City of New York*, 914 F.2d 348, 354 (2d Cir. 1990) (upholding neutral, generally applicable landmark preservation law against challenge by church seeking to expand its facilities to better carry out its ministerial programs); *New York State Employment Relations Bd. v. Christ the King Regional High Sch.*, 90 N.Y.2d 244 (1997) (upholding neutral, generally applicable labor law that forced religious school to engage in collective bargaining with lay faculty). The critical question for free exercise purposes is thus whether in purpose

and structure a statute is neutral and generally applicable. If a statute satisfies that test, the free exercise inquiry ends.

WHWA readily satisfies the *Smith* test: It is a neutral and generally applicable law that is not directed at prohibiting the exercise of religion, either overtly or covertly. Indeed, WHWA is no different than a host of generally applicable anti-discrimination laws, labor laws, and social security laws that have been unsuccessfully challenged by employers claiming the right to an exemption under the Free Exercise Clause.⁷ Like those laws, WHWA requires both secular and religiously affiliated employers operating in the secular market to comply with a general social regulation. Like those laws, it is constitutional.

The rationale behind the *Smith* rule is simple: The “mere possession of religious convictions which contradict the relevant concerns of a political society does not relieve

⁷ See, e.g., *Lee*, 455 U.S. 252 (social security taxes constitutionally imposed on Amish employers with sincere religious objection); *DeMarco v. Holy Cross High Sch.*, 4 F.3d 166, 172 (2d Cir. 1993) (Age Discrimination in Employment Act constitutionally applied to religious employers); *Intercommunity Ctr. for Justice & Peace*, 910 F.2d at 44 (immigration employment verification law constitutionally applied to employers with sincere religious objection); *Catholic High Sch. Ass’n v. Culvert*, 753 F.2d 1161, 1171 (2d Cir. 1985) (New York State Labor Relations Law constitutionally applied to religious schools); *Christ the King*, 90 N.Y.2d at 248-49 (same); see also *Walsh v. St. Mary’s Church*, 248 A.D.2d 792, 793 (3d Dep’t 1998) (adverse possession property law constitutionally applied to religious corporation).

Notably, among the range of generally applicable benefits laws, a contraceptive coverage mandate is not a novel obligation. At least nine other states have laws mandating contraceptive equity in prescription coverage, with no religious employer exemptions, or exemptions similar in scope to WHWA. See *Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 20-826(Z), (AA)(3)* (West 2003) (one of several like provisions); *Cal. Health & Safety § 1367.25(b)* (West Supp. 2001); *Ga. Code Ann. § 33-24-59.6* (1999); *Iowa Code Ann. § 514C.19* (West 2001); *Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 24-A, § 2756* (West 2001) (one of several like provisions); *N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 415:18-I* (West 2003) (one of several like provisions); *N.C. Gen Stat. § 58-3-178* (West 2003); *Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 8, § 4099c* (1993); *Wash. Admin. Code § 284-43-822* (West 2003).

the citizen from the discharge of political responsibilities.” *Smith*, 494 U.S. at 879

(internal quotes omitted). As the Court cautioned:

The rule [plaintiffs] favor would open the prospect of constitutionally required exemptions from civic obligations of almost every conceivable kind – ranging from compulsory military services, to the payment of taxes, to health and safety regulations such as manslaughter and child neglect laws, compulsory vaccination laws, drug laws, and traffic laws; to social welfare legislation such as minimum wage laws, child labor laws, animal cruelty laws, environmental protection laws, and laws providing for equality of opportunity for the races. The First Amendment’s protection of religious liberty does not require this.

Id. at 888-89 (internal citations omitted). Indeed, because it is generally applicable, WHWA need not include *any* exemption for religiously motivated conduct. *Id.* at 880. The fact that the Legislature has, in its discretion, chosen to provide a limited religious exemption does not render WHWA unconstitutional. *See infra* Part II.C.2.

Arguing otherwise, Plaintiffs contend that WHWA is not neutral on its face because its exemption for religious employers uses “religious terms and terminology that lack any secular meaning.” Reply Mem. of Law in Further Supp. of Pls.’ Mot. for Prelim. Inj. & in Opp’n to Def.’s Cross-Mot. at 27-28 [hereinafter Pls.’ Reply Mem.]. Plaintiffs thus insist that they are constitutionally entitled to a religious exemption *and* that any reference to religion in an exemption makes the law facially unconstitutional. This argument fails. Most importantly, Plaintiffs’ argument would make it impossible for legislatures to include religious exemptions in any generally applicable law. The Supreme Court has unequivocally rejected this result. In *Corporation of the Presiding Bishop v. Amos*, 483 U.S. 327 (1987), for example, the Court rejected the argument that the inclusion of a religious employer exemption in Title VII violates the Establishment Clause. In so doing, the Court emphasized that “it has never indicated that statutes that

give special consideration to religious groups are *per se* invalid. That would run contrary to the teaching of our cases that there is ample room for accommodation of religion under the Establishment Clause.” *Id.* at 338. In the same vein, the Court has held that the government has broad discretion to fashion an accommodation for religion when it chooses to do so. *See Smith*, 494 U.S. at 890.

Moreover, in arguing their position, Plaintiffs blatantly misconstrue the Supreme Court’s decision in *Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993). The Court in *Lukumi* concluded that a law is not facially neutral if it “infringe[s] upon or restrict[s] practices” by reference to “religious practice *without a secular meaning discernable from the language or context.*” *Id.* at 533 (emphasis added). Thus, the ordinances in *Lukumi* were suspect on their face because they prohibited activities that were defined primarily by reference to religious practices. In contrast, WHWA regulates health benefits offered to employees, a completely secular practice. It only uses the term “religious” in the context of *relieving* religious institutions of the Act’s mandate, not in defining the Act’s prohibitions.⁸

⁸ Plaintiffs similarly misconstrue the scope of *First Covenant Church v. City of Seattle*, 840 P.2d 174 (Wash. 1992). *First Covenant* involved a landmark preservation ordinance regulating any changes to the church’s exterior architecture. It was undisputed that given the “relationship between theological doctrine and architectural design,” the exterior of the church building was an expression of its religious belief. *Id.* at 217. Nonetheless, to receive an exemption from the regulation, the ordinance required the church to first explain and consult with the city whenever “changes in liturgy” necessitated architectural redesign and to consider “alternative . . . solutions.” *Id.* at 178. Thus, in effect, this reference to “liturgy” served to inject the city into church decisions about theological doctrine, thereby intruding on church autonomy. *See* discussion *infra* Part II.A. WHWA, and its reference to religion, imposes no such intrusion. *Cf. KDM v. Reedspport Sch. Dist.*, 196 F.3d 1046, 1051 (9th Cir. 1999) (use of the term “religiously-neutral settings” did not render regulation unconstitutional).

Finally, as discussed by the State in its Opposition Brief, WHWA’s legislative history does not even remotely suggest that the New York Legislature enacted WHWA, or its religious exemption, to target particular religious beliefs. See Mem. of Law in Opp’n to Pls.’ Mot. for Prelim. Inj. & in Supp. of Def.’s Cross-Mot. for Summ. J. at 18-20 [hereinafter State’s Mem. in Opp’n]. At most, the legislative record reveals that, unlike the legislation in *Lukumi*, the Act was passed “in spite of,” not “because of,” any impact it would have on a particular religious practice. *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 540 (internal quotations and citation omitted); see also *Knights of Columbus v. Town of Lexington*, 272 F.3d 25, 31-33 (1st Cir. 2001) (rejecting comparison to *Lukumi* when legislative history shows no evidence of religious discrimination). All told, the Act readily survives Plaintiffs’ challenge under the Free Exercise Clause.

II. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE OF THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.

WHWA likewise survives Plaintiffs’ challenge under the federal Establishment Clause. Plaintiffs complain that in exempting “religious employers,” WHWA impermissibly distinguishes between the religious and the secular; that the oversight necessary to implement the “religious employer” exemption leads to excessive government entanglement; and that the Act amounts to religious gerrymandering aimed at Catholicism. At every turn, Plaintiffs’ arguments fail.

A. The Constitution Permits Laws To Distinguish Between the Religious and the Secular.

Plaintiffs claim that, through its definition of “religious employers,” WHWA creates distinctions that effectively define the church and thus unconstitutionally intrude on church autonomy. Fundamentally, Plaintiffs argue that by distinguishing between the

religious and the secular WHWA impermissibly intrudes on a church's self-definition. The Constitution, however, not only permits, but often requires the state to make distinctions like those in WHWA. Plaintiffs' claim ignores this basic principle.

Courts, legislators, and administrators are frequently obligated to distinguish the religious from the secular. Indeed, the Establishment Clause forbids the advancement of religion, whereas the advancement of secular principles is permissible. *See, e.g., Bowen v. Kendrick*, 487 U.S. 589, 602 (1988). Thus, the Supreme Court has upheld laws providing direct grants of public funds to religiously affiliated hospitals,⁹ universities,¹⁰ and teenage pregnancy prevention programs¹¹ only after determining that their publicly funded work was, or would be, secular. In the same vein, the Supreme Court has held that direct grants of public funds may not support "specifically religious activit[ies] in an otherwise substantially secular setting." *Bowen*, 487 U.S. at 610, 613 (internal quotations and citation omitted). The Court has likewise held that the Establishment Clause permits public school teachers to teach remedial education at parochial schools only if their courses remain secular. *Agostini v. Felton*, 521 U.S. 203, 232-35 (1997). And the Supreme Court has held that public funds may not flow directly to "pervasively sectarian institutions," meaning institutions in which "religion is so pervasive that a substantial portion of its functions are subsumed in the religious mission." *Bowen*, 487 U.S. at 610, 613.

Likewise, only beliefs rooted in religion are protected by the Free Exercise Clause. Purely secular views do not suffice. *See, e.g., Frazee v. Illinois Dep't of*

⁹ *Bradfield v. Roberts*, 175 U.S. 291 (1899).

¹⁰ *Tilton v. Richardson*, 403 U.S. 672 (1971).

¹¹ *Bowen*, 487 U.S. 589.

Employment Sec., 489 U.S. 829, 833 (1989). In some contexts then, the Constitution requires a distinction between religious and secular activities, and between pervasively sectarian organizations and religiously affiliated institutions. Courts or other state actors making this constitutionally mandated distinction do not – as Plaintiffs argue – impermissibly define the church and its organizations.

Notably, the Supreme Court has deemed services secular for Establishment Clause purposes even when religious motivations support the provision of those services. In *Bowen v. Kendrick*, for example, the Court recognized that some religiously affiliated organizations sought public dollars for abstinence education because of a religiously based belief in promoting abstinence. 487 U.S. at 597, 607. Notwithstanding the religious motivations of those organizations, the Court held that they have the capacity to conduct abstinence programs in a secular manner for purposes of the Establishment Clause. *Id.* at 612. The Court clarified that the Establishment Clause is violated if the organizations include religious content in the publicly funded programs. *Id.* at 611-612. In recognizing that programs can be secular for Establishment Clause purposes notwithstanding an underlying religious motivation, the Court did not – as Plaintiffs argue – impermissibly intrude on church autonomy.

Here too, by not including Plaintiffs in its exemption for religious employers, the Act does not impermissibly define Plaintiffs' services as secular, in derogation of their religious motivation for their work. Rather, the Act simply exempts church organizations conducting core religious functions but does not exempt all religiously affiliated organizations. This line drawing is neither unfamiliar nor unconstitutional. Plaintiffs

benefit from the line drawing when they receive direct funding from the government; they cannot legitimately balk at the same line drawing now.¹²

Plaintiffs nonetheless insist that their omission from the exemption violates the Establishment Clause because it amounts to “state intervention into a doctrinal matter within a religious institution.” Pls.’ Reply Mem. at 9. Plaintiffs misunderstand the law. It is true that the Establishment Clause bars secular authorities from resolving matters of theological doctrine. *See* Def.’s Reply Mem. of Law at 10 (citing cases) [hereinafter State’s Reply Mem.]; *see also* *Watson v. Jones*, 80 U.S. 679 (1872) (court may not decide which faction can retain control of a church). Thus, for example, a court may not adjudicate a tenure dispute involving a professor of canon law at Catholic University, as the litigation would necessarily require a judge to determine the quality of the plaintiff’s scholarship in matters of ecclesiastical law. *EEOC v. Catholic Univ. of Am.*, 83 F.3d 455, 466 (D.C. Cir. 1996).

In this case, however, New York is not entering into, far less adjudicating, a dispute about religious doctrine. It is undisputed that Plaintiffs’ religious tenets prohibit the use of contraception. The Act says nothing about church doctrine on this issue;

¹² Plaintiffs’ heavy reliance on *Espinosa v. Rusk*, 634 F.2d 477 (10th Cir. 1980), *summarily aff’d*, 456 U.S. 951 (1982), is misplaced. In *Espinosa*, the court struck down a statute that required preregistration for secular but not religious solicitations. *Id.* at 479. The constitutional infirmity with the requirement, as applied, was not that the ordinance was “anti-religious” by virtue of distinguishing between the secular and religious, but that it afforded city officials excessive discretion in making a determination as to which activities qualified as religious. *Id.* at 481 (citing series of cases addressing discretionary prior restraints on free speech). Thus, *Espinosa* is one in a line of cases holding that the state may not grant administrators unfettered discretion in imposing prior restraints on first amendment activities. *See, e.g., Forsyth County v. Nationalist Movement*, 505 U.S. 123, 131 (1992); *Shuttlesworth v. City of Birmingham*, 394 U.S. 147, 150-51 n.2 (1969); *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940). These cases do not support Plaintiffs’ conclusion that the state may never draw distinctions between the secular and the religious.

rather, it expresses New York's secular state policy. Applying this labor law to ensure equal health benefits to Plaintiffs' workers does not impermissibly intrude on theological autonomy. As the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit has cautioned:

applying any laws to religious institutions necessarily interferes with the unfettered autonomy churches would otherwise enjoy, [but] this sort of generalized and diffuse concern for church autonomy, without more, does not exempt them from the operation of secular laws. Otherwise, churches would be free from all of the secular legal obligations that currently and routinely apply to them.

Bollard v. California Province of the Soc'y of Jesus, 196 F.3d 940, 948 (9th Cir. 1999).

B. The Administration of the Exemption Will Not Impermissibly Entangle the State with Religion.

Plaintiffs insist that the application of the exemption is complex and requires a governmental inquisition, with state officials interrogating workers about their faith. Their claim is specious. Most significantly, the exemption is sufficiently clear that all ten Plaintiffs had no trouble discerning that they did not qualify.

Moreover, the exemption employs criteria familiar from United States Supreme Court case law. Indeed, the Supreme Court, when deciding whether an institution is pervasively sectarian for Establishment Clause purposes, relied on the very factors used here. Thus, when assessing whether an institution is pervasively sectarian and therefore unable to receive government aid, the Court has considered whether a substantial purpose of the institution is inculcation of religious values, *Roemer v. Board of Pub. Works*, 426 U.S. 736, 755 (1976) (plurality opinion); *Hunt v. McNair*, 413 U.S. 734, 744 (1973); *Tilton v. Richardson*, 403 U.S. 672, 685, 687 (1971) (plurality opinion), and whether the institution hires and serves people who share its faith, *Roemer*, 426 U.S. at 757-58 (plurality opinion); *Hunt*, 413 U.S. at 743-44, 746; *Tilton*, 403 U.S. at 686 (plurality

opinion). If consideration of these factors – the primary purpose of an institution and the religious affiliation of employees and clients – is relevant to the Supreme Court’s review of a law for Establishment Clause purposes, they are plainly permissible here.

Moreover, a review of the criteria illustrates the exaggeration inherent in Plaintiffs’ claims. The four criteria defining a “religious employer” – *all* of which must be satisfied to qualify for an exemption – together define an organization engaged in core religious activities, such as worship services and inculcation of religious doctrine. One criterion – exemption from federal tax filings – is obviously easily ascertainable. To qualify for that federal tax exemption, an entity must be a church, an integrated auxiliary of a church, a convention or association of churches, or “the exclusively religious activities of any religious order.” 26 U.S.C. § 6033(a)(2)(i), (iii). An entity that qualifies will likely satisfy the Act’s other three criteria, which logically flow from the status as a church, integrated auxiliary, or religious order. Those institutions primarily exist to inculcate religious values. Most of their employees and those receiving their services would naturally share their religious tenets.

Plaintiffs assert that neither they nor the State can determine whether their workers primarily share their faiths. But this is simply untrue. An entity does not create a workforce comprised primarily of co-religionists by accident. It consciously engages in religious scrutiny in hiring, if its employees’ responsibilities (such as teaching theology) make their religious background relevant to their work. Even where an entity exercises its prerogative to hire only co-religionists for nonprofit affiliates that engage in secular work, *see Amos*, 483 U.S. 327, it will certainly *know* that its labor force meets the Act’s exemption criteria. Likewise, it will know when it does not. Indeed, Plaintiffs concede

that they do not meet the exemption’s criteria because “Plaintiffs do not primarily employ persons who share their religious beliefs, but, rather, employ a diverse group of persons of many religious backgrounds.” Compl. ¶ 50. There is no reason to speculate that the State will challenge Plaintiffs’ representation as to the composition of its workforce, particularly when considered in conjunction with the other factors defining a religious entity.

Plaintiffs plainly do not qualify for an exemption; they satisfy none of the Act’s criteria. *See* Compl. ¶ 50. The Catholic and Baptist Churches or ministries with which Plaintiffs are affiliated plainly do qualify. For all the hypothetical confusion they posit, Plaintiffs have not identified any religiously affiliated entity that would raise a close question as to its qualification for the exemption. Neither the entities nor the State would experience any confusion in administering the Act. The Act, therefore, does not impermissibly entangle government officials with religion.

C. The Act Does Not Impermissibly Discriminate Among Religions.

Plaintiffs next claim that the New York Legislature passed the Act to disadvantage the Catholic Church and that the Act is therefore unconstitutional. There is simply no support for this charge, either in the text of the law or its legislative history.

1. The Act does not impermissibly discriminate against religious denominations that oppose contraception.

As Supreme Court precedent makes amply clear, laws frequently conflict with some religious tenets and harmonize with other religious tenets, but that fact does not make the laws discriminatory or the lawmakers guilty of religious persecution. For example, the Supreme Court rejected a claim that the federal Hyde Amendment, which

eliminated Medicaid coverage for abortion, violates the Establishment Clause because it incorporates “into law the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the sinfulness of abortion and the time at which life commences.” *Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297, 319 (1980). In so holding, the Court emphasized that a statute does not violate the Establishment Clause “because it ‘happens to coincide or harmonize with the tenets of some or all religions.’” *Id.* at 319-320 (quoting *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U.S. 420, 442 (1961)). The Supreme Court and other courts have repeatedly applied this principle to uphold Sunday closing laws,¹³ federal grants to religious organizations for teen pregnancy prevention,¹⁴ selective service laws,¹⁵ denial of charitable deduction for payments to religions in expectation of spiritual services,¹⁶ and denial of federal tax exemption to racially discriminatory colleges.¹⁷

Indeed, the courts have rejected an argument directly mirroring that at issue here, namely, that laws prohibiting gender discrimination violate the Establishment Clause. For example, in *EEOC v. Tree of Life Christian Schools*, 751 F. Supp. 700 (S.D. Ohio 1990), the court rejected a religiously affiliated employer’s argument that the Equal Pay Act violates the Establishment Clause because it has the “effect of favoring those religions whose beliefs do not conflict with majoritarian precepts,” and disfavoring those believing that God ordained different roles for men and women. *Id.* at 713. Similarly, the Act does not violate the Establishment Clause simply because it conflicts with

¹³ *McGowan*, 366 U.S. at 442.

¹⁴ *Bowen*, 487 U.S. at 604 n. 8.

¹⁵ *Gillette v. United States*, 401 U.S. 437, 452 (1971).

¹⁶ *Graham v. Comm’r*, 822 F.2d 844, 853 (9th Cir. 1987).

¹⁷ *Bob Jones Univ. v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574, 604 n.30 (1983).

Catholic doctrine on birth control. Indeed, the presence of two Baptist-affiliated complainants in this action belies Plaintiffs' claim that WHWA patently targets Catholic organizations.

2. The religious employer exemption does not render the Act discriminatory.
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Plaintiffs next attempt to create an image of unconstitutional religious gerrymandering from the scope of the religious employer exemption. Plaintiffs complain that the exemption omits religious institutions devoted more to the provision of social services than to worship. *See, e.g.*, Pls.' Reply Mem. at 12. The religious employer exemption thus does not go as far as Plaintiffs would like. But the government is under no constitutional obligation to exempt all religiously affiliated organizations from generally applicable laws if it exempts churches. Laws can and do distinguish between the church and related nonprofit organizations. In *Dole v. Shenandoah Baptist Church*, 899 F.2d 1389 (4th Cir. 1990), for example, the Court of Appeals ruled that a religious school must comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act, although its sponsoring church was exempt. The court expressly rejected the argument that "the government should be required to accept the church's characterization of Roanoke Valley [the school] as an inseverable part of the church." *Id.* at 1396; *see also Catholic Charities v. Superior Court*, 109 Cal. Rptr. 2d 176, 190 (Ct. App. 2001) ("There is nothing impermissible about granting an exemption for certain but not all activities") (unpublished pursuant to California Rules of Court 976(d)),¹⁸ *petition for review granted*, 31 P.3d 1271 (Cal.

¹⁸ Plaintiffs wrongly insist that any consideration of this decision is improper under California Rules of Court 976(d) and 977(a). It is true that pursuant to Rule 976(d), an opinion superseded by a grant of review shall not be published and pursuant to 977(a), any unpublished opinion cannot be relied on by California courts. It is, however, firmly

2001). Plaintiffs' claim that the Legislature cannot exempt the spiritual church without also exempting all of its affiliated enterprises, hospitals, colleges, and charities, no matter how secular, is a radical and unrecognized constitutional position.

Moreover, the scope of WHWA's religious accommodation is not proof of bias. Rather, the government has broad discretion to fashion an accommodation for religion. *See Smith*, 494 U.S. at 890 ("leaving accommodation to the political process . . . must be preferred"); *see also Adams v. Comm'r*, 170 F.3d 173, 180 (3d Cir. 1999) (noting religiously-based exemptions from federal tax laws are not required but "a matter of legislative grace").¹⁹ In the Act, the New York Legislature has fashioned a neutral exemption that achieves a sensitive and constitutional balance between the church's need for religious freedom and workers' need for health care.

In addition, Plaintiffs lack the evidence of government bias against religion that infected all cases in which courts have found religious gerrymandering. In *Larson*, the

within this Court's discretion to consider the relevant reasoning and analysis contained in the *Catholic Charities* opinion. Numerous courts, including the Ninth Circuit, have considered and cited California court decisions that have been superseded by a grant of review or are otherwise unpublished. *See, e.g., Ortiz-Sandoval v. Gomez*, 81 F.3d 891, 895 (9th Cir. 1996) (relying upon logic of "depublished" California appellate decision while noting it could not be cited as decisional law); *Strawser v. Exxon Co. U.S.A.*, 843 P.2d 613, 619 (Wyo. 1992) (citing to "depublished" California case, while noting that under California rules it could not be cited within California); *cf. Silver v. Rochester Savs. Bank*, 73 A.D.2d 81, 85 (4th Dep't 1980) (taking note of "depublished" California appellate decision). *But see Ortiz v. New York City Hous. Auth.*, 22 F. Supp. 2d 15, 34 (E.D.N.Y. 1998) (refusing to cite unpublished California decision [in diversity action applying New York law]).

¹⁹ *Adams* was brought under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a statute that by its terms requires the application of strict scrutiny to religious exercise claims. Specifically, RFRA provides that the government shall not "substantially burden a person's exercise of religion" except when it furthers a "compelling governmental interest" by the "least restrictive means." *Id.* at 175 (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-1). Prior to the decision in *Adams*, the Supreme Court held RFRA is not constitutionally applicable against the states. However, as noted in *Adams*, RFRA's strict scrutiny standard is still applicable against the federal government. *Id.*

Minnesota legislature crafted the exemption at issue – which narrowed a preexisting exemption for all religions – to distinguish between novel and established religious organizations and indeed to target the “Moonies.” *Larson v. Valente*, 456 U.S. 228, 247 n.23, 253-55 (1982). In *Lukumi*, the Hialeah city council passed the ordinances in direct response to the Santeria religion’s plan to establish a new church. 508 U.S. at 525-26. And in *Church of Scientology Flag Service Organization, Inc. v. City of Clearwater*, 2 F.3d 1514 (11th Cir. 1993), the legislative materials provided “explicit evidence that the city commission conducted its legislative process from beginning to end with the intention of singling out Scientology for burdensome regulation.” *Id.* at 1531.

The New York Legislature was not on a similar campaign to persecute the Catholic Church. *See* State’s Mem. in Opp’n at 10-11, 18-20. It was, instead, engaged in an effort to address gender discrimination and the failure of an estimated fifty percent of insurance plans to cover prescription contraceptives. *See id.* at 6-8.²⁰ Moreover, organizations affiliated with both denominations represented by Plaintiffs fall on *both* sides of the Act’s religious employer exemption. Indeed, the exemption benefits the Catholic Church – which lobbied for an exemption – as well as its Baptist counterpart: *Because* their religious tenets proscribe the use of contraceptives, any of their institutions meeting the four-part religious employer test need not comply with the statute’s

²⁰ In any event, even if the Act amounted to religious gerrymandering under *Larson*, it would be constitutional because it is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling state interest. *See id.* at 23-28; State’s Reply Mem. at 18-22; *Larson*, 456 U.S. at 246.

requirements. Ins. Law §§ 3221(1)(16)(A), 4303(cc)(1).²¹ Plaintiffs' efforts to cast the Act as impermissible religious discrimination is thus without foundation.

III. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE NEW YORK CONSTITUTION.

The New York Constitution is independent of, and can be more protective than, its federal counterpart. *See, e.g., People v. Barber*, 289 N.Y. 378, 384 (1943). Yet, even under the more rigorous scrutiny required by the New York Constitution, WHWA does not violate Plaintiffs' free exercise rights. Nor does it violate the New York equivalent of the federal Establishment Clause.

A. The Act Does Not Violate Plaintiffs' Free Exercise Rights Under the New York Constitution.

New York courts have traditionally applied a balancing test to free exercise claims brought under Article I, Section 3 of the state constitution. In *People v. Woodruff*, 26 A.D.2d 236 (2d Dep't 1966), *aff'd no op.*, 21 N.Y.2d 848 (1968), the Appellate Division, Second Department, assessed a criminal defendant's claim that she could not be compelled to testify before a grand jury in violation of her religious beliefs. The court balanced "the interest of the individual right of religious worship against the interest of the State which is sought to be enforced." 26 A.D.2d at 238. The Court of Appeals affirmed, *Woodruff*, 21 N.Y.2d 848 (1968), and has relied on the *Woodruff* balancing test in later decisions. *See, e.g., LaRocca v. Lane*, 37 N.Y.2d 575 (1975) (holding that state's interest in ensuring a fair trial outweighed attorney's right to wear clerical garb in court);

²¹ Similar exemptions, apparently benefiting a single religion because the doctrines that conflict with secular laws are not widely shared, have been unsuccessfully challenged on Establishment Clause grounds as preferential treatment of religion. *Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty, Inc. v. De Parle*, 212 F.3d 1084 (8th Cir. 2000), *cert. denied*, 532 U.S. 957 (2001); *Kong v. De Parle*, 2001 WL 1464549 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 13, 2001), *appeal pending*.

People ex rel. DeMauro v. Gavin, 92 N.Y.2d 963, 964 (1998) (holding that lower court properly rejected defendant’s free exercise claim that his religion required him to violate a zoning ordinance). The Third Department has applied a similar balancing test to a prison employee’s claim that a Department of Corrections directive requiring him to keep his hair short violated his right to free exercise. The court held that the state needed to demonstrate “a legitimate State interest which outweighs the negative impact upon his religious freedom.” *See Rourke v. New York State Dep’t of Correctional Serv.*, 201 A.D.2d 179, 182-83 (3d Dep’t 1994) (holding that the State had failed to demonstrate any such interest).

By its terms, the *Woodruff* test approaches, although it is not identical to, the strict scrutiny test that applied to federal free exercise claims before the United States Supreme Court in *Employment Division v. Smith*.²² *See Woodruff*, 26 A.D.2d at 238 (citing as support for its balancing test *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963), a pre-*Smith* federal free exercise case requiring that burdens on free exercise be narrowly tailored to advance a compelling state interest). Both the *Woodruff* test – which the Court of Appeals has applied even after *Smith*, *see, e.g., DeMauro*, 92 N.Y.2d at 963 – and strict scrutiny require “a determination whether a restriction will be . . . imposed on the individual’s freedom of worship; and secondly, a determination whether the presence of a restriction is justified, after a consideration of the social and constitutional values involved.” *Woodruff*, 26 A.D. 2d at 238 (citing *Sherbert*, 374 U.S. 398). As a result, both New York cases applying the *Woodruff* standard and federal pre-*Smith* cases applying the strict

²² *See, supra* Part I.A, discussing *Smith* standard.

scrutiny standard are useful in assessing claims under the New York Free Exercise Clause.

This Court need not determine the exact contours of the *Woodruff* test, because even assuming it is as exacting as strict scrutiny, the Act is constitutional: It is narrowly tailored to advance the compelling state interests of promoting gender equality and public health. *Amici* adopt herein the arguments on these points advanced by the State and the Women and Reproductive Rights *Amici*, see State's Mem. in Opp'n at 22-28; State's Reply Mem. at 18-23; Brief of *Amici Curiae* American Jewish Congress *et al.* in Opp'n to Pls.' Mot for Prelim. Inj. & in Supp. of Def.'s Cross-Mot. for Summ. J., and address three additional points. First, the burden WHWA imposes on Plaintiffs' free exercise is insufficient to sustain a successful free exercise claim. Second, Plaintiffs err in arguing that only those state interests meeting the narrowest definition of "peace or safety" can justify a burden on free exercise. Third, the Act legitimately prevents Plaintiffs' exercise of their religious beliefs from burdening third parties.

1. The Act's burden on Plaintiffs' free exercise rights is insufficient to sustain a successful free exercise claim.

WHWA's impact on Plaintiffs' religious exercise is insufficient to sustain a successful free exercise claim. Plaintiffs claim that by purchasing a generally available prescription drug plan they somehow "facilitate" and are "morally complicit" in their employees' use of contraception. See, e.g., Pls.' Reply Mem. at 41. However, courts applying a strict scrutiny standard of review have deemed comparable "facilitation" arguments insufficient to sustain a successful free exercise challenge.

In a closely related case, for example, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit held that a public university does not substantially burden students' exercise of religion

by compelling them to pay mandatory fees that subsidize student health services, including abortion, which the objecting students consider to be a grave sin. *See Goehring v. Brophy*, 94 F.3d 1294 (9th Cir. 1996).²³ The court reasoned that the mandatory fees did not substantially burden the students’ religious rights because the compulsory act required only the payment of money. The students were “not required to accept, participate in, or advocate in any manner for the provision of abortion services.” *Id.* at 1300.

Here too, WHWA similarly does not require religious objectors to use contraceptives or to advocate for their use.²⁴ Rather, it requires insurance companies to include contraceptive coverage in prescription drug plans. Plaintiffs choosing to provide prescription drug coverage merely purchase an insurance plan that covers a broad range of health care services, including contraceptives, which an employee may or may not choose to use in her private life, far removed from the office. Moreover, Plaintiffs remain free to oppose birth control, to attempt to persuade their employees not to use contraception, and to convey their moral message to their adherents. Plaintiffs’ claim should thus meet the same fate as the challenge in *Goehring*.

²³ Like *Adams*, *Goehring* was brought under RFRA, and the court therefore applied strict scrutiny. *See supra* note 19.

²⁴ Courts have consistently held that mere exposure to views inconsistent with one’s religion does not violate the right to free exercise. *See, e.g., Ware v. Valley Stream High Sch. Dist.*, 75 N.Y.2d 114, 124 (1989) (“It is generally acknowledged that mere exposure to ideas that contradict religious beliefs does not impermissibly burden the free exercise of religion.”); *see also Grove v. Mead Sch. Dist. No. 354*, 753 F.2d 1528, 1543 (9th Cir. 1985) (“[D]istinctions must be drawn between those governmental actions that actually interfere with the exercise of religion, and those that merely require or result in exposure to attitudes and outlooks at odds with perspectives prompted by religion.”).

Related cases bolster this conclusion. In *United States v. Lee*, 455 U.S. 252 (1982), for example, the Supreme Court held that despite their sincere religious objections to, *inter alia*, the receipt of government benefits, Amish employers could be constitutionally compelled to contribute to the social security tax system. Likewise, in *Adams v. Commissioner*, the Third Circuit rejected a request for exemption from tax obligations despite the plaintiff's sincere religious belief that "participation in war is contrary to God's will, and hence, that the payment of taxes to fund the military is against the will of God." 170 F.3d at 174. New York courts have similarly rejected requests for exemptions from state tax and benefit schemes. See *Sisters of Saint Joseph v. City of New York*, 49 N.Y.2d 429, 441-42 (1980) (no free exercise exemption from real property tax); *Matter of Faith Bible Church v. Hudacs*, 179 A.D.2d 308, 313 (3d Dep't 1992) (no free exercise exemption from payment of unemployment contributions).

2. Cognizable state interests are not limited to the narrowest definition of "peace or safety."
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Plaintiffs further err in arguing that only laws protecting a hyper-narrow notion of "peace or safety" may trump a free exercise burden under the New York Constitution. Both the historical context surrounding the inclusion of those terms in the state's constitution, see State's Reply Mem. at 15-17, and their interpretation by the courts establish that a broader range of state interests apply.

Indeed, the earliest reported free exercise case to reach the Court of Appeals squarely rejected a narrow reading of the state's ability to protect the "peace or safety." In *People v. Pierson*, 176 N.Y. 201 (1903), a parent who was convicted of failing to seek medical attention for his child claimed that his conduct was protected by Article I, Section 3, because his religion did not believe in physicians. In rejecting his claim, the

court interpreted the “peace and safety of the state [to] involve[] the protection of the lives and health of its children as well as the obedience to its laws.” *Id.* at 211. Later courts have continued to apply a broader interpretation of the state interests that may outweigh a burden on free exercise. These include, notably, an interest in ensuring the equal protection of the law, *see Williams v. Bright*, 230 A.D.2d 548, 553 (1st Dep’t 1997), as well as an interest in maintaining the legal system’s integrity, *see id.*; *LaRocca*, 37 N.Y.2d 575; *Woodruff*, 26 A.D.2d at 239.

Courts in other states with comparable state constitutional language have likewise rejected narrow interpretations of “peace or safety.” These states include Minnesota and Washington, which Plaintiffs emphasize because they have constitutions that contain “identical limiting language” and are modeled after the New York Constitution. Mem. of Law in Supp. of Mot. for Prelim. Inj. at 44-45 [hereinafter Pls.’ Mem. of Law]; Pls.’ Reply Mem. at 27. Tellingly, the Minnesota Supreme Court has refused to exempt a religious school from compliance with state labor laws, notwithstanding the school’s religious objections, on the ground that “[o]ne of the state’s most compelling interests is to ensure the peace and safety of labor relations.” *Hill-Murray Fed’n of Teachers v. Hill-Murray High Sch.*, 487 N.W.2d 857, 861-68 (Minn. 1992). For their part, the Washington courts have identified numerous state interests as sufficient to justify infringement on religious beliefs, including state interests in “requiring hospital staff to purchase professional liability insurance”; “requiring blood tests for putative fathers”; “requiring an x-ray . . . for tuberculosis”; and “requir[ing] . . . a driver’s license [for motorists].” *State v. Balzer*, 954 P.2d 931, 937-38 (Wash. Ct. App. 1998) (holding infringement on religious freedom justified by state interests in, *inter alia*, protecting

against adverse health effects of marijuana use); *see also Open Door Baptist Church v. Clark County*, 995 P.2d 33 (Wash. 2000) (upholding zoning law furthering state interest in protecting physical environment against church’s free exercise challenge); *cf. Munns v. Martin*, 930 P.2d 318, 322 (Wash. 1997) (citing cases recognizing variety of interests beyond narrow conception of peace and safety sufficient to outweigh burden on free exercise). Like the binding New York precedent discussed above, these cases establish that Plaintiffs’ insistence on a narrow reading of “peace or safety” is without merit.

3. The Act legitimately prevents Plaintiffs’ from imposing their religious beliefs on third parties.

Plaintiffs’ religious tenets with regard to contraception are entitled to respect. However, the exemption that Plaintiffs seek would impose their beliefs on their religiously diverse workforce. The Act legitimately operates to prevent that result. Both relevant case law and New York state constitutional history support this conclusion.

First, a concern for third parties is evident in New York free exercise case law. In *Williams v. Bright*, for example, the plaintiff had refused surgery after a car accident because the necessary blood transfusions would violate her religious beliefs as a Jehovah’s Witness. It was uncontested that without surgery, she would likely live “a wheelchair-bound life,” whereas surgery “offered her the prospect of a good recovery and a near normal life.” 230 A.D.2d at 550. She sought reimbursement from the car leasing agent and its insurance company for damages resulting from the accident. The question before the court was whether her sincere religious belief in any way exempted her from state law requiring plaintiffs in tort actions “to use reasonable and proper efforts to make the damage as small as practicable.” *Id.* Holding that it did not, the First Department emphasized that “the real issue here is whether the consequences of [a religious] belief

must be fully paid for here on earth by someone other than the injured believer.” *Id.* at 552. Because of its concern for the burden an exemption would impose on third parties, the court held that the plaintiff was required “to mitigate damages under the same standard required of all other persons similarly situated who do not share similar religious convictions.” *Id.* at 551; *see also In re Sampson*, 37 A.D.2d 668 (3d Dep’t 1971) (rejecting mother’s claim that requiring son to have blood transfusion and surgery for facial disfigurement would violate her free exercise rights).

Likewise, when applying a strict scrutiny analysis, federal courts have often taken care to ensure that third party rights are not detrimentally affected by free exercise exemptions. In *Lee*, for example, the Supreme Court rejected an Amish religious employer’s claim for an exemption to the Social Security law based in part on the impact it would have on employees. The Court held that “the limits [employers] accept on their own conduct as a matter of conscience and faith are not to be superimposed on the statutory schemes which are binding on others in that activity. Granting an exemption . . . to an employer operates to impose the employer’s religious faith on the employees.” 455 U.S. at 261. Similarly, in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972), the Supreme Court expressly limited its holding to avoid a religious accommodation that would burden others’ rights. The parents in *Yoder* sought an exemption on religious grounds from a compulsory education requirement. Allowing the exemption, the Court emphasized that permitting the parents to educate their children at home would not detrimentally affect their children’s rights, as the record included no evidence showing either that the children wanted to attend high school or that the children would be harmed by being educated at home. *Id.* at 230-32. *See also Blackwelder v. Safnauer*, 689 F. Supp. 106, 133, n.31

(N.D.N.Y. 1988) (rejecting free exercise claim in part because “the interests of the children . . . can[not] be ignored in any proper balancing of conflicting interests when the free exercise rights of homeschooling parents are implicated”).

Finally, Plaintiffs err in suggesting that the history and text of Article I, Section 3, and in particular its phrase “liberty of conscience,” permit their free exercise to trump a resulting burden on third parties. As Judge Michael W. McConnell has noted in his influential study of the origins of free exercise (which is cited by Plaintiffs), in the eighteenth century “liberty of conscience” connoted “*individual judgment*,” not “the corporate or institutional aspects of religious belief.” Michael W. McConnell, *The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion*, 103 Harv. Law Rev. 1409, 1490 (1990) (emphasis added). It connoted an individual’s right to follow his own conscience in matters of religion, to be free from discrimination on the basis of religion, and to be free from civil duties – such as required oaths – that would violate his conscience. John Witte, Jr., *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Religion in the American Constitutional Experiment*, 71 Notre Dame L. Rev. 372, 390-92 (1996) (citing writings of contemporary religious liberty proponents). It afforded no extra protection to the *institutional* exercise of religion, which has far greater potential to burden third parties. Plaintiffs’ reliance on the phrase is thus unfounded.

B. The Act Does Not Violate the “Preference Clause” of Article I, Section 3 of the New York Constitution.

Plaintiffs further err in arguing that the Act violates the “Preference Clause” of Article I, Section 3 of the New York Constitution, which provides for “the free exercise and enjoyment of religious preference and worship, without discrimination or preferences.” N.Y. Const. art. I, § 3. This claim is properly analyzed under the same

standard as their federal Establishment Clause claim. *See, e.g., Germenis v. Coughlin*, 232 A.D.2d 738 (3d Dep’t 1996) (applying the same analysis to address both federal and state establishment of religion claims); *Lewis v. Allen*, 11 A.D.2d 447, 451 (3d Dep’t 1960), *aff’d mem.*, 14 N.Y.2d 867 (1964). Indeed, as Plaintiffs themselves note, “in the context of the New York Constitution’s Establishment Clause, the New York courts have traditionally applied an analysis that follows the lead of the United States Supreme Court.” Pls.’ Mem. of Law at 51; *see also* State’s Mem. in Opp’n at 36-37. Thus, for the same reasons that Plaintiffs’ Establishment Clause claim fails under the Federal Constitution, *see supra* Part II, it likewise fails under the state Constitution.

IV. THE ACT DOES NOT VIOLATE THE FEDERAL OR STATE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF EXPRESSION OR ASSOCIATION.

Plaintiffs have failed to establish a colorable claim that WHWA violates their right to engage freely in expressive conduct or association. Plaintiffs cannot seriously argue that the Act in any way prohibits them from expressing their views on artificial contraception. Plaintiffs remain free to denounce the use of contraceptive drugs and devices and to urge their employees to refrain from using them. Nor does the Act require Plaintiffs to include or exclude members based on their viewpoints regarding contraception. Thus, their expression claims rest solely on the unsupported theory that compelled expression or association results from the purchase of an insurance plan that includes benefits to which they have religious objections.

1. The Act Does Not Implicate Expressive Conduct.

Under both the federal and state constitutions, a free expression claim triggers a two-part inquiry. In the first instance, the court must “determine whether [Plaintiffs’ actions] constitute ‘expressive conduct’ entitled to protection.” *Zalewska v. County of*

Sullivan, 316 F.3d 314, 319 (2d Cir. 2003); *People v. Hollman*, 68 N.Y.2d 202, 205-06 (1986). Only after Plaintiff makes this threshold showing does the court consider whether the law “impermissibly denies [Plaintiffs] such protection.” *Zalewska*, 316 F.3d at 319; *Hollman*, 68 N.Y.2d at 206-07; *see also Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 403 (1989); *Al-Amin v. City of New York*, 979 F. Supp. 168, 172 (E.D.N.Y. 1997). With respect to the first inquiry, “the fact that something is in some way communicative does not automatically afford it constitutional protection.” *Zalewska*, 316 F.3d at 319. Thus, to determine whether particular activities constitute “expressive conduct,” a court must ask “whether [a]n intent to convey a particularized message was present, and [whether] the likelihood was great that the message would be understood by those who viewed it.” *Johnson*, 491 U.S. at 404 (alteration in original) (internal quotations and citations omitted).

Plaintiffs fail to meet the initial inquiry. As myriad cases evidence, the conduct required to comply with WHWA does not amount to expression of a particularized message. For instance, in *Glickman v. Wielman Brothers & Elliott*, 521 U.S. 457, 477 (1997), agricultural producers were required to place purchase orders within the framework of a collectively regulated market and were assessed fees to fund the regulatory scheme. The fees funded, among other components of the scheme, generic advertising. Plaintiff, which did not want to support the advertising, claimed that the assessment constituted a violation of its First Amendment free speech rights. The Court rejected this claim. Finding that the *primary* purpose of the assessment was not to subsidize speech, but to further a broader scheme of “economic regulation,” the Court held the subsidy did not implicate First Amendment concerns. *Id.* at 471-74; *cf. United*

States v. United Foods, 533 U.S. 405, 415 (2001) (holding compelled subsidy unconstitutional where “principal object is speech itself”).

Likewise, the Second Circuit has held that a rule requiring a city transit employee to wear pants despite her deep cultural belief in wearing skirts did not implicate First Amendment rights. *Zalewska*, 316 F.3d at 320. The court held that because the choice of wearing skirts, as opposed to pants, would not be understood as a particularized message, it did not rise to the level of constitutionally protected expressive conduct. *Id.* Further, it has been held that requiring a Catholic university to provide facilities to a gay rights student group, which endorsed conduct contrary to Catholic theology, is not forced expression. *Gay Rights Coalition of Georgetown Univ. Law Ctr. v. Georgetown Univ.*, 536 A.2d 1 (D.C. 1987). The court held that the school’s provision of tangible benefits to the student group would amount to neither “an abstract expression of the University’s moral philosophy” nor an expression of support for the group or its views. *Id.* at 20-21. Similarly, by requiring Plaintiffs to buy an insurance plan that includes contraceptive benefits, WHWA neither prevents Plaintiffs from expressing their views against contraception nor compels an expression of support for contraceptive use.

Plaintiffs’ reliance on a line of cases prohibiting compulsory funding does not change this analysis. *See* Pls.’ Mem. of Law at 70; Pls.’ Reply Mem. at 36-37. In each of those cases, the funding was used to subsidize “ideological activities” that had the “expression of political views” as their primary purpose. *Abood v. Detroit Bd. of Educ.*, 431 U.S. 209, 235-36 (1977) (public employer may not compel union members to pay subsidies for political speech to which they object); *Ellis v. Bhd. of Ry. Clerks*, 466 U.S. 435 (1984) (employer may not compel union fees to subsidize ideological advocacy

unrelated to collective bargaining and settling grievances); *Keller v. State Bar of California*, 496 U.S. 1 (1990) (state bar may not compel fees that subsidize political or ideological causes). *Amici* do not dispute that when a law compels inherently communicative conduct like subsidizing ideological activities,²⁵ saluting a flag,²⁶ or visibly displaying a state message,²⁷ First Amendment protections come into play. But Plaintiffs fail to demonstrate how compliance with WHWA is remotely analogous to any of these activities.

2. The Act Does Not Implicate Associational Rights.

Plaintiffs' expressive association claim fails to implicate any of the associational concerns protected under the First Amendment or under Article I, Section 9 of the New York Constitution. Unless a law implicates the ability of individuals and groups to associate freely, neither the federal nor the state right of associational expression comes into play.

Both the federal and state constitutions protect the "right to association with others in pursuit of a wide variety of political, social, economic, educational, religious, and cultural ends." *Roberts v. United States Jaycees*, 468 U.S. 609 (1984); *Golden v. Clark*, 76 N.Y.2d 618 (1990) (recognizing parallel rights of association under federal and state constitutions). This right also "presupposes a freedom not to associate" with individuals who "may impair the ability of the group to express those views." *Boy Scouts*

²⁵ *Abod*, 431 U.S. at 235-36.

²⁶ *West Virginia State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 634 (1943).

²⁷ *Wooley v. Maynard*, 430 U.S. 705 (1977).

of *Am. v. Dale*, 530 U.S. 640, 648 (2000) (internal quotations omitted).²⁸ Yet the Act does not require Plaintiffs to associate with members who will impair Plaintiffs' ability to express their views on artificial contraception. See *Golden*, 76 N.Y.2d at 627-29 (rejecting associational claim under state constitution because law did not limit ability of plaintiffs' members to associate and express their views). And Plaintiffs do not allege how the Act prevents them from associating with, or disseminating their message through, individuals of their choosing. Thus, despite Plaintiffs' conclusory statements to the contrary, compliance with a health insurance law that happens to advance goals in conflict with Plaintiffs' religious beliefs simply does not fall within the framework of expressive association.

V. PLAINTIFFS DO NOT MAKE OUT A "HYBRID RIGHTS" CLAIM.

Finally, Plaintiffs' attempt to establish a "hybrid rights" claim entitled to strict scrutiny analysis is equally unavailing. First, even assuming that hybrid rights claims are entitled to strict scrutiny, Plaintiffs' argument fails because they have not made out such a claim. A "plaintiff does not allege a hybrid-rights claim entitled to strict scrutiny analysis merely by combining a free exercise claim with an utterly meritless claim of the violation of another alleged fundamental right." *Miller v. Reed*, 176 F.3d 1202, 1208 (9th Cir. 1999). In order to state a colorable "hybrid rights" claim, "other discrete

²⁸ To the extent Plaintiffs cite *Boy Scouts* in support of their right of expression, rather than their right of association, their reliance is misplaced. In *Boy Scouts*, the Supreme Court held that the Scouts had a "First Amendment right to send one message but not the other," and had therefore lawfully dismissed Dale upon learning he was homosexual and a gay rights activist. *Boy Scouts*, 530 U.S. at 655-56. The discussion in *Boy Scouts* focused on Dale's position of leadership in the Scouts and thus his ability to influence the content of the Scouts' apparent message to those both within and outside of the organization. *Id.* at 657. The contents of a health plan can hardly be considered to parallel the expressive role of an organization's leadership.

constitutional protections . . . [must] also [be] implicated.” *Christ the King*, 90 N.Y.2d at 250. For the reasons discussed above, Plaintiffs’ claims based on the right of expression and association are without merit, or at most redundant of their free exercise claim.²⁹ Thus, Plaintiffs cannot maintain a hybrid rights claim.

Moreover, even if Plaintiffs had raised a valid hybrid rights claim, that claim would not be entitled to any special review. The Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit has expressly rejected the contention that hybrid rights claims are entitled to strict scrutiny analysis. In *Leebaert v. Harrington*, 332 F.3d 134 (2d Cir. 2003), the court stated that it could “think of no good reason for the standard of review to vary simply with the number of constitutional rights that the plaintiff asserts have been violated,” and held that until the Supreme Court directed otherwise it would “not use a stricter legal standard to evaluate hybrid claims.” *Id.* (rejecting claim that strict scrutiny should apply to plaintiff’s claims of a violation of free exercise and parental rights) (internal quotations and citations omitted); accord *Kissinger v. Bd. of Trustees of the Ohio State Univ.*, 5 F.3d 177 (6th Cir. 1993). *But cf. Leebaert*, 332 F.3d at 143 (citing several circuit court decisions that have recognized, but not applied, a standard of heightened review for hybrid claims). Any hybrid rights claim that Plaintiffs could allege would fail under the standards discussed above.

CONCLUSION

The WHWA is a health measure that protects important workers’ rights. The Act promotes the public health and gender equality, and respects religious liberty. No

²⁹ As already discussed by the State, Plaintiffs similarly fail to allege facts or point to law that would support an independent equal protection claim in this context. *See* State’s Mem. in Opp’n at 38-39. Thus, the equal protection argument does not create grounds for alleging a hybrid-rights claim.

constitutional principle prohibits Plaintiffs' employees from receiving the protection this law affords thousands of workers throughout the state.

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