

Criswell College sues government over Obama health mandate

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DALLAS (ABP)-[Criswell College](#), a Southern Baptist Bible school with informal ties to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, sued the federal government Nov. 1, claiming the contraceptive mandate in President Obama's Affordable Care Act violates the school's opposition to abortion.



Criswell College campus in Dallas.

Criswell College, named after its founder, W.A. Criswell — longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas and spiritual godfather of the “conservative resurgence” movement that shifted the Southern Baptist Convention rightward in the 1980s and 1990s — joins more than 30 other plaintiffs in lawsuits aimed at blocking enforcement of the administration’s 2010 overhaul of the nation’s health-care system, often known as Obamacare.

Like other Baptist schools in previous lawsuits, including Louisiana College

and Liberty University, Criswell objects to being required to pay for contraceptive drugs for female employees that they believe induce abortion.

The coverage mandate exempts churches but not faith-based institutions with more than 50 employees, that may or may not share the organization's religious tenets, and with purposes broader than "the inculcation of religious values."

The lawsuit [says](#) that means the government finds Criswell - described as a "Christ-centered institution of higher learning" that affirms biblical inerrancy - not "religious" enough to be entitled to constitutional protection.

"It would require us to obtain insurance that would cause us to violate our religious beliefs," Criswell College Jerry Johnson said in a press release. "For us, this is a religious-liberty issue. We don't want to have to pay for something that we have a religious conviction against."

The college's statement of faith is based on the Baptist Faith and Message as amended by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000. It [declares](#), "Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord," and "We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death."

The lawsuit points out that Criswell's faith statement is more conservative than the one held by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The BGCT affirms the Baptist Faith and Message as adopted by the SBC in 1963, prior to additions establishing husbands as head of the household and banning women preachers. The BGCT supports nine universities. Two of them, East Texas Baptist University and Houston Baptist University, together [filed a similar lawsuit](#) Oct. 9 challenging the health-care law.

Numerous lawsuits have been filed challenging Obamacare on different

grounds. More than 30 involve religious employers who claim the coverage mandate contravene the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 or the U.S. Constitution.

A U.S. district judge in Michigan [issued](#) a temporary injunction ruling the federal government cannot force one Catholic business owner to include contraception in health-insurance coverage it provides to 170 employees, Christian-owned Hobby Lobby asked a judge in Oklahoma to block a portion of the law mandating the company provide morning-after birth control pills, and the Justice Department told the Supreme Court it does not object to review of an earlier ruling that went against Liberty University.

The White House has said it is sensitive to religious-liberty concerns but is determined that women have full access to health care. Some say the solution is for a single-payer health-care plan funded by the government similar to Medicare, an idea opposed by conservatives and insurance companies.

Established in 1970, Criswell College has 322 students and 50 employees. It was housed in facilities of First Baptist Church in Dallas before moving to a free-standing campus in an abandoned church building in 1989. President Jerry Johnson, Criswell's sixth, began service in December 2003.