Written by Eric Tiansay
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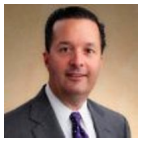

Hobby Lobby Stores and sister retailer Mardel Christian and Education have "discovered a way" to avoid being penalized by the federal government for not covering abortion-inducing drugs in their employee healthcare plans. An attorney for the Green family, which owns the Oklahoma-based companies, said the chains could avoid fines for several months.

Starting Jan. 1, when the new healthcare plan was to take effect, Hobby Lobby and Mardel were to face fines of up to $1.3 million daily for defying the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' abortion pill mandate, a regulation under the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare).

However, Peter Dobelbower, an attorney and vice president for Hobby Lobby, said in a Jan. 10 statement that that date had been postponed, but he didn't elaborate.

"Hobby Lobby discovered a way to shift the plan year for its employee health insurance, thus postponing the effective date of the mandate for several months," Dobelbower said. "Hobby Lobby does not provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs in its healthcare plan. Hobby Lobby will continue to vigorously defend its religious liberty and oppose the mandate and any penalties."

Last month, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor denied the request by Hobby Lobby and Mardel for an injunction while the case is pending, saying the stores did not meet the legal standard for blocking the requirement on an emergency basis. However, she said, the companies may still challenge the regulations in the lower courts.

In November, U.S. District Judge Joe Heaton said that although churches and other religious organizations have been granted constitutional protection from the abortion mandate, "Hobby Lobby and Mardel are not religious organizations."