

# *U.S. judge strikes down mandated coverage of HIV prevention drug, citing religious freedom*

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Austin, September 9 (RHC)-- In the U.S. state of Texas, a federal judge has ruled in favor of a group of Christians who sued to overturn a federal requirement that employer-based health insurance plans cover the cost of drugs that prevent the spread of HIV.

U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor ruled that the Affordable Care Act's requirement that health insurers cover pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, violated the "religious freedom" of Christian-owned businesses. The plaintiffs argued the requirement forces them to provide coverage for drugs that "facilitate and encourage homosexual behavior, prostitution, sexual promiscuity, and intravenous drug use." Clinical studies show PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99%.

Judge O'Connor is a far-right George W. Bush appointee who's previously called the Affordable Care Act "unconstitutional." His ruling threatens to cut off sexual and reproductive healthcare for more than 150 million U.S. residents who have employer-based healthcare plans. Primary care and HIV physician Dr. Oni Blackstock tweeted in response: "This makes no sense and I'm assuming is being driven solely by homophobia and transphobia. Disgusting and inhumane."

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