



## **2007 BIENNIAL BUDGET BILL**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In February, Governor Doyle introduced his proposed biennial state budget for 2007-09 (Senate Bill 40). Between now and July, the legislature will review the Governor's proposal as modified by the Joint Committee on Finance and consider amendments to it.

### **BUDGETS FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE**

While government budgets are laden with numbers, statistics and estimates, fundamentally they are about people and the priorities of the community. And while the Wisconsin Catholic Conference does not take a position on the budget as a whole, the Conference does urge Catholics to assess budgets in light of their impact on the common good, the extent to which they exercise a preferential option for the poor, and the degree to which they foster solidarity among the citizens of our state.

Based upon these broad principles, the WCC has identified four specific areas of interest and concern to engage as the budget debate progresses over the next several months.

### **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

#### **Maintain Funding for Programs Targeted to the Needy**

Programs that provide services to needy individuals and their families are always a priority for the WCC. Among these are the Community Aids program through which the state helps counties fund locally based human services programs, and medical assistance programs, such as Medicaid and BadgerCare. These services provide vital programs to persons with disabilities, the elderly, and families with low-income access to health care services.

The Governor's budget spares these programs from spending cuts. However, as was the case in past budgets, the Governor avoided such reductions by relying on other revenue sources and fee increases. If the legislature decides not to approve these funding arrangements, it will either have to find other funding sources or impose reductions in these programs for the needy.

The WCC only rarely addresses the specific question of which revenue sources should pay for government programs, other than to encourage that taxes be based on a person's ability to pay them. The more critical question is: Are we doing enough to help needy citizens support themselves and to participate fully in the life of the community?

As one considers this question, it is important to note that Wisconsin has made significant strides in providing quality health care access to children and families in need. Similarly, our state's "safety net" is stronger than that of most other states. This is an important factor in Wisconsin's high quality of life and an important measure of our state's commitment to social justice.

- *Please urge legislators to sustain state support for Community Aids, BadgerCare, Medicaid, the Wisconsin Works program (W-2), and other programs funded with medical assistance dollars to keep health and family services available to needy families and persons with disabilities.*

## **Support Ethical Stem Cell Research**

The budget continues to fund stem cell research. Generally, research is a good thing and most stem cell research is consistent with Catholic teaching and values. However, some of the budget's funding will be used to finance research that relies on stem cells derived from destroyed human embryos. This is the one form of stem cell research that Catholic teaching finds objectionable.

Human life is sacred, even life at the earliest stages of development, and as such it must be respected and protected. When we treat embryos as *things* – things that people own and have the power to manipulate, patent, and destroy – this undermines the sacredness of human life.

- *Please urge legislators to **support** public funding for research on stem cells obtained without the deliberate termination of human life, and to **oppose** research that destroys human embryos.*

## **A New Direction in Corrections Policy**

The budget includes initiatives to foster alternatives to prison for offenders – alternatives that are consistent with the 1999 WCC statement on corrections. These include:

1) Additional funding to address mental health needs of prisoners; 2) expanding community based options for offenders at risk of being returned to prison for parole violations; 3) reducing the term of extended supervision in the community for inmates released from prison; 4) creating a grant program to fund civil legal services for indigent offenders once they are released; and 5) re-examining sentencing guidelines for people who are non-violent and who are drug or alcohol dependent.

- *Please urge legislators to support initiatives to provide education and treatment to persons in the prison system and to seek alternatives to incarceration for non-violent drug and alcohol offenders.*

## **Support Additional Funding for Homeless Shelters**

The homeless are largely invisible in society. In fact it's hard to know how many people are homeless. Data from the state of Wisconsin suggests about 20,000 people are homeless. Other data indicate the number may be double that, or 40,000. A growing number are children.

For many years, state funding for homeless programs has been frozen at \$1 million a year. With this limited funding, service providers have struggled to meet such needs as emergency shelter and transitional housing assistance. This year, the budget includes an increase of \$1 million dollars per year to provide assistance to homeless shelters and other programs to help homeless residents. The \$2 million dollar increase in state revenue to homeless services won't solve all the problems facing the homeless, but it is a place to start. This is one budget provision that exercises a "preferential option for the poor."

- *Please urge legislators to support the increased funding for homeless shelters and programs.*

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Please urge Legislators to support the positions identified above.

*For more information, please contact the Wisconsin Catholic Conference at 608/257-0004.*