

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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For Immediate Release

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE TAKES STANCE ON STATE BUDGET PROVISIONS

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) is urging legislators to support some aspects of Governor Walker's proposed state budget bill and to modify or reject others. The positions are part of the advocacy message Catholics from around Wisconsin shared with legislators during the WCC's *Catholics at the Capitol* on April 5th.

In March, Governor Walker introduced his proposed biennial state budget for 2011-13 (Senate Bill 27 and Assembly 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.

"The Wisconsin Catholic Conference does not take a position on the budget as a whole," explained WCC Executive Director John Huebscher. "Rather, the WCC urges individuals to assess budgets in light of their impact on the common good, the extent to which they show a preferential option for the poor, and the degree to which they foster solidarity among the citizens of our state."

The WCC is endorsing a number of the provisions in the budget that expand access to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). These include lifting the cap on overall enrollment in the program, allowing religious and other nonpublic schools in Milwaukee County to accept MPCP students, and removing the mandate that MPCP schools administer the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE). The WKCE is a state-sponsored test that does not measure student performance based on the curriculum used in Catholic schools, and its required use hazards identifying MPCP students within a school.

The WCC is also backing a provision to repeal the mandate that every health insurance policy include coverage of contraceptive services.

"This provision is about respect for religious freedom. Catholic organizations should not be compelled to purchase services that violate our moral teachings," Huebscher explained.

Other budget provisions that the WCC supports are those that discontinue state funding of family planning services for men and to organizations that provide abortion services. As part of its stance on these provisions, the WCC is asking that the funds used for those purposes be redirected to programs that serve needy individuals and families.

The WCC also expressed opposition to several items that reduce support for low-income persons

or families:

- The homestead tax credit program directs property tax relief to low-income homeowners and renters. Currently, such credits are indexed for inflation. The budget repeals this indexing for a savings of about \$8 million. As a result, the low-income families who rely on the credit will receive no increase this year. The WCC wants this indexing restored.
- The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is offered at both the federal and state levels as a means of providing assistance to lower-income workers. Under current law, an individual may claim the refundable Wisconsin EITC if he or she has one or more qualifying children. The budget adjusts the credit available to 5 percent of the federal EITC for a claimant with one qualifying child, and lowers it to 8 percent for those with two children, and 40 percent for those with three or more children. Statewide low-income families will receive about \$20 million less each year as a result of this change. The WCC want to retain current law.
- The budget reduces the monthly cash grant to families in the Wisconsin Works Program, or W-2 program, by \$20. The WCC wants to restore that cut as well.

The WCC opposes denying access to BadgerCare and Medicaid for those who are eligible for both programs. The WCC also asks that immigrants, even those who did not have legal status upon graduation from a Wisconsin high school, remain eligible for instate tuition at the University of Wisconsin system, and that legal immigrants not lose their access to FoodShare benefits.

“Budgets are laden with numbers, statistics, and estimates, but fundamentally they are about people and the priorities of the community,” Huebscher added. “As a result, budgets are legislative proposals with moral implications.”

To view the WCC’s 2011-13 Biennial Budget Issue Brief, visit http://www.wisconsinatholic.org/issue_briefs_home.cfm.

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