



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative Steve Kestell, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Kim Wadas, Associate Director

DATE: May 3, 2011

RE: Assembly Bill 110, Special Needs Scholarship Program

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) urges support for Assembly Bill 110 creating the Special Needs Scholarship Program. The Special Needs Scholarship Program provides scholarships to eligible children with disabilities, permitting students to attend the public or private school of the family's choice, and better serves those families searching for ways to improve the educational experience of their special needs student.

Every human life has an innate dignity, and recognition of this dignity requires that as a society we enable every individual to achieve the fullest measure of personal development of which he or she is capable. The right to life implies the defense of all other rights, including rights of equal opportunity in employment, housing, health care, and education. Persons with disabilities should have access to an educational experience that meets their physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional needs. Simply because their needs may be unique should not prevent them from having access to the same educational opportunity provided to students without special needs. The Special Needs Scholarship Program ensures that individuals with disabilities can participate in the same exercise of choice enjoyed by other students by helping to remove those financial barriers that may prevent families from seeking education alternatives.

The Special Needs Scholarship Program also upholds the rights of the parents and guardians of children with disabilities. As those first responsible for the health, safety, and education of their children, parents have a right to choose a school that best meets their children's needs. Public authorities have a corresponding duty to guarantee this parental right and for "ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise," (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2229). As Catholics, we believe public policies should affirm the vital role of parents in their children's education by giving them meaningful choices in where and how their children are educated. By providing necessary resources for students and their families, the Special Needs Scholarship Program is a recognition by our state of the distinct challenges facing families of children with special needs. Its enactment would strengthen these parents and help them to fulfill their role as the primary educators of their children.

The WCC urges your support for Assembly Bill 110.