



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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

FROM: Kim Wadas, Associate Director

DATE: April 19, 2011

RE: Assembly Bill 92, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program Expansion

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) strongly supports Assembly Bill 92, which would expand options for families in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) by eliminating the program's enrollment limit and by allowing schools in Milwaukee County to participate in the MPCP.

The WCC's support for the continued growth of the MPCP is grounded in the long-standing principle that parents are the primary educators of their children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expressly states:

“As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.” (#2229, italics in original)

Parents educate their children daily, teaching and sharing with them the life skills needed to live as responsible members of society. 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.

Our Catholic tradition also includes a call to exercise a “preferential option for the poor.” This principle is advanced when those of limited means are empowered with the ability to exercise their rights in the same manner available to other citizens who enjoy more material resources. The MPCP is an example of such an option. The program gives parents the ability to exercise their basic rights and guide their children's education without discrimination.

AB 92 would allow more eligible students in the City of Milwaukee to participate in the MPCP by eliminating the 22,500 pupil enrollment limit and by allowing religious or independent schools in Milwaukee County to participate in the MPCP. Hundreds of students living in the City of Milwaukee remain unable to avail themselves of the opportunities the MPCP provides

because either there are no open MPCP seats at the schools they would like to attend – a particular problem for MPCP students entering secondary education – or the only non-public school that could realistically serve a student is located outside the city limits and currently barred from MPCP participation.

Facilitating the expansion of the MPCP to allow more schools to accept MPCP students provides yet another way to bridge the divides of geography, economics, and race that can limit student achievement. By giving eligible students and schools more options, AB 92 ensures that all parents and guardians within the City of Milwaukee are given the opportunity to fulfill their role as primary educators.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this proposal and urges you to support Assembly Bill 92.