



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director

DATE: December 3, 2018

RE: Assembly Bill 1072 – Federal Government Waivers and Other Requests

On behalf of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, we respectfully request that you oppose Assembly Bill 1072, which seeks to codify certain public benefit requirements, including increased costs for the poorest Wisconsin Medicaid recipients and drug testing to participate in FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET). Since 2015, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) has testified numerous times in favor of expanding access to health care and nutrition programs for those in most need. We do so again today.

Year in and year out, our five Catholic Charities affiliates throughout Wisconsin regularly serve thousands of individuals in extreme poverty. Catholic health care facilities constitute one-third of all such facilities in Wisconsin. Catholic food pantries, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, and other charities across the state assist families in need, regardless of race, creed, health condition, drug addiction, age, or employment status.

Health care is a basic human right and access to health care for all has been a policy goal of the U.S. bishops since 1919. Catholic teaching stresses that public policy must prioritize service to the poor and vulnerable. We continue to be deeply concerned with BadgerCare Plus requirements for Wisconsin's impoverished childless adults that impose monthly premiums for access to care and copays for emergency room use. The WCC also continues to oppose time limits on Medicaid eligibility. All of these measures are likely to defer needed treatment and worsen medical conditions.

Furthermore, our experience tells us that drug addiction is a scourge that cannot be solved using punitive measures. Effective trauma-informed drug treatment programs are too few and simply cannot keep up with current demand – a demand that is only increased by state-mandated drug testing and treatment as a condition of participating in the FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) program.

Before members of the Legislature vote on this bill, please consider the long-term impact of these changes. Drug addiction is frequently fueled by underlying mental health issues and most addicts relapse several times after receiving treatment. Addicts on a waiting list for drug treatment will have greater difficulty successfully participating in FSET, as addiction likely fostered their lack of employment in the first place.

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Finally, depriving the poorest among us of needed food and health care will only shift the burden to the hundreds of private charities, Catholic and other, which are already overwhelmed. While as Catholics we stand ready to serve the common good, we cannot be expected to serve more with less.

Everyone has an interest in reducing drug dependency, improving health, and encouraging labor force participation. We urge you not to tie the hands of Wisconsin's most vulnerable residents by enacting laws that limit their recovery, but instead work together to improve the lives of all of Wisconsin's residents.

Please oppose Assembly Bill 1072. Thank you for your consideration.