

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 23, 2007

**BUDGET ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE WISCONSIN CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), Executive Director John Huebscher this week urged members of the Budget Conference Committee "to develop a budget that protects human life, promotes family, and pursues social justice."

The Budget Conference Committee, consisting of eight members, four from each house and party, is charged with the task of reconciling the Senate and Assembly versions of the budget. Since these versions are so far apart in scope, the Committee's work is expected to take at least several weeks.

The WCC today delivered a list of recommended actions under four main headings: children and families, corrections, education, and health care.

Children and Families. The WCC supports allocating an additional \$1 million for homeless shelters for women and children; providing cash assistance to women who are experiencing an at-risk pregnancy that prevents them from working; and fully funding *Wisconsin Shares*, the state's daycare assistance for low-income families.

Corrections. The WCC recommends several proposals that would protect the human dignity of prison inmates and provide for effective rehabilitation. The Earned Release Review Commission would encourage inmates to work toward their early release from prison. Additional state funds would enable counties to establish community based drug and alcohol treatment and prison diversion programs. Increased funds for medical and mental health services would benefit the underserved female inmate population. Finally, the WCC supports additional state funds for organizations that provide civil legal services to the poor.

Education. Noting that low-income parents deserve the same educational options as middle-class parents, the WCC supports the modest expansion of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to Racine and to high schools in Milwaukee County. The WCC reminded lawmakers of their promise last session to increase funding for smaller elementary classes in public schools (SAGE program). On the other hand, the WCC opposes using the budget process to phase out school integration programs (Chapter 220), and it opposes allowing educational institutions to terminate or not hire unpardoned felons whose crimes bear no relation to the job they are applying for or performing.

Health Care. While the WCC does not endorse any of the various health plans put forth in the budget process, it does support expanding the number of Wisconsin residents who have ready access to affordable health care. At the same time, the WCC reminded the Committee that any health care expansion must respect human life from conception to natural death. In the area of children's health, the WCC urges that Medicaid coverage be

extended to youths exiting foster care up to the age of 21, so that they can have adequate time to find suitable health coverage on their own. The WCC also supports diverting state aid from organizations that counsel or provide abortion services, to those that provide services to pregnant and parenting women, so that they might adequately care for their children or place them in loving adoptive homes. Finally, the WCC recommends that contraception not be given to underage males and females without parental consent, as envisioned under a proposed expansion of the Family Planning Demonstration Project.

In addition to writing to the Budget Conference Committee, Huebscher encouraged all Catholic voters to become involved in the budget process by contacting their representatives and making their views known.

“The state budget is the single most influential piece of legislation produced by the Governor and Legislature,” Huebscher explained. “We need to ensure that our elected representatives understand that the final test of any budget is how adequately it addresses the needs of our state’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens.”

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