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For Immediate Release

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

BUDGET PROVISION PENALIZES SOME NONPUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN

An amendment added to the state budget would put transportation for some nonpublic school families across Wisconsin at risk if not removed in the coming weeks.

School districts in Wisconsin are required to provide transportation services to all students, both public and nonpublic. However, under a new budget provision, school districts would be allowed to withdraw busing services for families who have two or more children attending the same nonpublic school building and offer them a single transportation contract in its place. The family would receive a contract amount equal to the average cost of busing one child in the district, or \$5 a mile, whichever is greater.

“This ill-conceived idea jeopardizes safe transportation for larger families who choose religious or independent schools,” explained WCC Executive Director John Huebscher.

Huebscher noted that parents with less flexible work schedules, those who live in small towns and rural areas, or families that pay per child for transit services would face a special burden.

“This provision may not seem onerous for those in a job with a flexible work schedule who live in a city or suburb,” Huebscher noted, “but it will be a burden for blue-collar workers who must punch a clock, farm families, and those who live greater distances from school.”

Huebscher continued, “The current per pupil payment system ensures that families can meet the rising costs of transportation. Families forced to agree to these transportation contracts suffer the loss of busing services and bear the burden of arranging transportation for their children. With this new provision, families will now have to find transportation for four children with the budget for one.”

Huebscher added that in most of Wisconsin, Catholic school children live on the same bus routes as public school children. Using buses on these routes reduces fuel consumption.

“For example, consider the case of one school bus transporting the children of five Catholic school families on the same bus route as used for public school students. Under the contract approach, five separate cars will have to make two round trips a day to transport the same 10 children,” he explained. “With fuel prices heading back to \$3 a gallon and government leaders urging us to find ways to reduce the use of gasoline, this idea is as bad for the environment as it is for Catholic families.”

Matt Kussow, Executive Director for the Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools, voiced similar concerns. “This change to our busing laws unfairly targets large families who pay taxes like everyone else,” Kussow observed. “We need to act quickly and voice our opposition to legislative leaders to defeat this amendment. Once lost, these services will be hard to get back.”

Now that the Joint Finance Committee has finished its work on the budget, the document goes to the Assembly with action scheduled to begin on June 9th. The budget then goes to the Senate. Any removal of the busing provision must occur during this process.

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