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For Immediate Release

RELIGIOUS GROUPS URGE GOVERNOR TO PROTECT POOR IN STATE BUDGET

Leaders of four statewide religious groups have urged Governor Doyle to protect the needs of the poor as he finalizes his decisions on Wisconsin's 2009-11 State Budget. The request came in a letter signed by the directors of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the Wisconsin Jewish Conference and the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin.

"As you reach your final decisions on the budget you will soon submit to the legislature, we urge you to make every effort to fund those programs that effectively serve our state's most vulnerable residents," the directors wrote.

"Any economic downturn imposes pain and suffering. Yet one constant in such difficult times is that those with the least tend to lose the most. A loss of income or savings that poses a temporary inconvenience in some families is often truly devastating to those who were just getting by in better times," they argued. "Those who were in need of the community's help prior to the current downturn need it even more now. The programs and public benefits that aided them in 2008 will be even more necessary in 2009."

The religious advocates said they recognize the difficult choices facing the Governor and noted that their own churches and synagogues face similar concerns.

"Like you, we must balance budgets. Like the state government, our faith communities face the challenge of meeting greater needs when economic problems affect revenues available to us," they wrote. "But it is precisely at these times that we must affirm our commitment to the core principles that define who we are as a society. One of these core principles is that the poor have a special claim on the support and assistance of the community, regardless of the circumstances."

"This need to exercise an "option for the poor" is not unique to our faith traditions. Many others share it. Indeed, it is very much a part of Wisconsin's noble tradition of progressive government," they added.

The four also noted that Wisconsin's faith community would strive to do its part in helping the needy.

"We remain committed to helping the vulnerable through our churches and synagogues, hospitals, schools, and charitable agencies. But we cannot by ourselves meet the need that exists. Our next state budget must allow this partnership to continue to help those who need help," they emphasized.

A copy of the letter is attached:

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