



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CATHOLIC CONFERENCE ASKS FOR VETO OF BAIL BOND PROVISION

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) has asked Governor Walker to veto a provision in the state budget that permits commercial bail bonding in Wisconsin.

In commercial bail bonding, defendants pay a percentage (usually 10percent) of the bail set by the court to a bail bond agent who in turn posts bail for the defendants, thereby enabling them to remain free until their court date. The fee paid to the bail bondsman is non-refundable, even if the defendants are later found to be innocent of all charges.

Under current Wisconsin law, bail bonding is prohibited. Instead, defendants post bail with the county clerk of courts and, if the defendants are convicted, the court can use some of the bail money to compensate victims and to cover certain court expenses.

In a letter to the Governor, WCC Executive Director John Huebscher noted that in their statement on crime and punishment in Wisconsin, the state's Catholic bishops wrote "Criminal justice policies . . . must ensure that justice is as accessible to victims and offenders who are poor as it is to those who are more affluent."

"The bail bonding provision undermines this principle in several important respects," Huebscher argued.

The WCC letter asserts that tying bail to a private business transaction will profit the bondsmen, while those of limited means who cannot afford the bond languish in jail awaiting trial.

"Our government should not enable some people to get rich at the expense of others' freedom," Huebscher wrote.

The letter also suggests that under the current system, defendants who are found innocent are entitled to a full refund of their bail. "By contrast, the amount paid to the commercial bail bondsman can never be reclaimed. This imposes an added and completely unnecessary financial burden on the poorest members of our community. Because these defendants can only post cash, they must lose a portion of it, even if they are completely innocent."

"Our current system has served Wisconsin well. We respectfully urge you to veto this provision, as you did last session," the letter concludes.

The letter can be found at www.wisconsincatholic.org.

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A copy of the letter is attached.

For more information, contact John Huebscher or Barbara Sella at 608-257-0004.