

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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CATHOLIC CONFERENCE PRAISES GOVERNOR'S VETO OF RESIDENCY LIMITS FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference praised Governor Doyle for his veto of legislation to deny access to basic health and public assistance benefits to undocumented immigrants.

Senate Bill 567 would have mandated that anyone applying for public assistance (e.g. W-2, BadgerCare, etc.) show documentary proof of citizenship or lawful residency. Furthermore, anyone processing an application for public assistance would have been required to attest in writing that he or she had seen such proof of citizenship or residency. Those who neglect to do so would be subject to a \$250 fine.

The WCC submitted written testimony in opposition to the bill, on the grounds that it was unnecessary and potentially harmful.

Recalling testimony given on behalf of the two state agencies—the Department of Health and Family Services and the Department of Workforce Development—that regulate the state's largest public assistance programs, the WCC warned that while fraudulent use of these programs by undocumented immigrants appears to be rare, there is considerable evidence that asking for this type of documentation will discourage some eligible people from applying in the first place.

“A significant number of those affected by SB 567 would have been among our most vulnerable residents—elders, individuals with mental or emotional disabilities, and children,” explained WCC Executive John Huebscher. “These individuals or their care givers do not always have ready access to the types of documents required by SB 567.”

Other groups opposed to the bill included the Wisconsin Council of Churches and the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

“We do not endorse illegal immigration. Neither should we deal with its effects in a way that might deter many legal residents from seeking public benefits to which they have a rightful claim,” he added.

“Society can best build a culture of life by deciding public policies in favor of the vulnerable members of the human family. The Governor made such a decision with his veto and we commend him for it,” Huebscher concluded.

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