



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on State Affairs and Government Operations

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director

DATE: February 10, 2016

RE: Assembly Bill 723 and Senate Bill 533 – Photo Identification Cards

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) – the public policy voice for Wisconsin’s bishops – is providing this written testimony on Assembly Bill 723 (and companion Senate Bill 533) for information only.

The bills would prohibit counties and towns (but not cities or villages) from issuing photo identification cards. The bills would also restrict the uses of photo IDs issued by cities or villages.

The WCC supports widespread access to identification documents that allow people to lead healthy, dignified, and productive lives, move safely in their community, and know the true identity of the persons with whom they are dealing.

This position is based on several principles of Catholic social teaching. The first is the option for the poor and vulnerable. This principle requires that any action or public policy be measured first in terms of how it affects those who live in poverty or are vulnerable because of age, disability, ill health, etc. In these situations, having valid identification is critical to obtaining the resources for which these persons are eligible.

The second principle is the call to family, community, and participation. This principle recognizes that humans are social beings and that society benefits when every person is fully engaged and working for the common good. Today more than ever, having valid identification enables a person to be a fully functioning member of society. For example, without a valid ID it is very challenging for an unemployed person to find a job and become self-sufficient.

The third principle refers to the rights and responsibilities of every person to live a decent life. Having valid identification is essential if people are to meet the responsibilities they have to themselves, their families, and their communities. In the case of undocumented immigrants, we also have to remember that many of them have children who are lawful U.S. citizens. It is in the state’s interest to ensure that these children become healthy and contributing members of the community by providing their parents the tools necessary to meet their daily needs.

We recognize that the authors have amended their bills to allow ID cards for employment, public transit, and access to county or town services and facilities. However, our state can do better. Indeed, we think that the real problem this debate reveals is that Wisconsin's laws overly restrict the ability of people in poverty, or who are otherwise marginalized, to obtain valid identification. In particular, the current system for obtaining a Wisconsin driver's license or a Wisconsin ID card leaves too many people unable to access them. A free Wisconsin ID is only available for those eligible to vote, leaving impoverished citizens who would like to obtain the ID for non-voting purposes unable to do so.

Therefore, we urge lawmakers to improve access to state ID cards. Justice, fairness, and the future vitality of Wisconsin depend on it.