



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

April 3, 2009

For Immediate Release

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE SPEAKS TO STATE BUDGET

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference focused on the needs of the poor and needy in Wisconsin in its written testimony on the 2009 state budget, Assembly Bill 75.

The WCC offered its comments in a March 23rd memo to the Joint Committee on Finance from WCC Executive Director John Huebscher.

“Although government budgets are laden with numbers, statistics, and estimates, fundamentally they are about people and the priorities of the community,” he wrote.

Huebscher went on to urge the Committee to assess the budget in light of its impact on the common good, the extent to which it exercises a preferential option for the poor, and the degree to which it fosters solidarity among the citizens of our state.

The WCC testimony addressed a number of specific issues.

- 1) The WCC asked the Committee to sustain state support for Medicaid, BadgerCare, Community Aids, the Wisconsin Works program (W-2), and other programs funded with Medical Assistance dollars, so that families and individuals facing serious crises may continue to receive much needed assistance.

“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,” he noted. “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. Those who were in need of the community’s help prior to the current downturn need it even more now.”

- 2) The WCC urged the Committee to make certain that regulations affecting the Milwaukee Parental Choice program do not hinder the ability of Catholic schools to serve the thousands of students who use vouchers to attend them. He noted that some of the proposed regulations, such as new testing requirements and requirements that Choice schools comply with the open meeting laws, were especially problematic.
- 3) The WCC endorsed a number of budget provisions that provide help to pregnant women and families with children. These include:

- Funding an annual 5% increase in uniform foster care, and increased funding for kinship care.
- Extending eligibility in the Wisconsin Works program (W-2) to women with no other children who are in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified at-risk pregnancy.
- Permitting a woman who has participated in the Wisconsin Works program for at least three months prior to giving birth to remain at home for up to 26 weeks.

The WCC argued that these provisions are all “part of a safety net that helps women choose childbirth over abortion, and helps them develop strong bonds with their newborns.”

- 4) The WCC testimony also endorsed an expansion of the Badgercare Plus program to extend coverage to 41,000 childless adults across Wisconsin.

“Since 1919, the United States Catholic bishops have supported universal access to health care,” the WCC reminded the Committee. “This program takes us one important step closer to achieving that goal for Wisconsin’s residents.”

- 5) The WCC opposed a provision to extend coverage to men who meet the specified qualifications of the Medical Assistance family planning waiver program. The WCC argued that the state should not engage in the promotion of artificial contraception, especially when that includes the distribution of contraception to teens without parental knowledge.
- 6) The WCC also urged the panel to remove a provision providing domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples, arguing that the issue should not be part of the budget bill.

“A separate debate outside the budget process could permit a thorough assessment of the plan’s intended and unintended impact on the institutions of marriage and family. We need to be sure that such a provision does not have the effect of diluting the unique status that marriage enjoys in our laws.”

The WCC may address other issues in the budget as developments occur and new items are added to the budget.

The WCC memo to the Joint Committee on Finance is posted on the WCC website. Visit www.wisconsinatholic.org for more information.