



## 2015-16 STATE BUDGET BILL

### INTRODUCTION

In February, Governor Walker introduced his proposed biennial state budget for 2015-16 (Senate Bill 21 and Assembly Bill 21). Between now and July, the Legislature will review the Governor's proposal, as modified by the Joint Committee on Finance, and consider amendments to it.

### BUDGETS FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

While the WCC does not take a position for or against the state budget as a whole, it recognizes that budgets are moral documents through which our state makes choices and sets priorities. The WCC therefore does address aspects of the budget that advance or hinder important moral principles. For Catholics, two vital principles are respect for the life and dignity of the human person and promotion of the common good. More specifically, every public policy should be measured by how it addresses the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized so that they can have the opportunity to lead dignified lives and participate as fully as possible in the life of the community.

Several budget provisions uphold these principles and deserve to be included in the final document, while others do not and should be removed. Additionally, we urge that two items be incorporated into the budget proposal.

### BUDGET ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE RETAINED

**Family Care.** Expand Family Care to all Wisconsin counties so that more elders and people with disabilities can receive vital long-term care. However, the WCC questions drastic proposed changes to the current member-focused, cost-effective, localized model of providing care.

**Mental health and substance abuse.** Expand Medicaid coverage for residential-based substance abuse treatment. If the budget consolidates certain mental health funds with Community Aids, there should be a mechanism to make certain these funds remain dedicated to mental health treatment.

**Child survivors of sex trafficking.** Provide an additional \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2016-17 for treatment services to sex-trafficked children, especially in rural areas.

**Survivors of domestic violence.** Provide an additional \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2016-17 to expand services to survivors of domestic violence and their families.

**Parental Choice Programs.** Expand parental choice in education throughout the state for lower income families.

### BUDGET ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE REMOVED

**Drug testing of public benefits recipients.** Remove the drug testing requirements for certain applicants for Unemployment Insurance benefits, Transform Milwaukee, Transitional Jobs, Children First, and Trial Employment Match Program, as well as for childless adults seeking FoodShare and/or Medicaid benefits.

The WCC strongly supports helping people escape drug dependency and embrace healthy and responsible lifestyles. Indeed, our Catholic Charities agencies, hospitals, and parishes run countless programs to help those who are addicted to drugs. However, the budget requirements are unwise for several reasons:

- Drug abuse afflicts all income levels. Tying drug testing only to certain forms of public assistance unjustly holds some people to a higher standard of accountability than the rest of us who may benefit from other

forms of government assistance (e.g., school vouchers, student loans, small business loans, farm subsidies).

- Wisconsin's Catholic Charities directors advise that most of those in their drug treatment programs relapse several times before achieving lasting recovery, so denying them essential benefits will simply impede recovery. If the Legislature wants to encourage participation in drug treatment programs, then it can do so without restricting access to food, employment, and health care.
- Drug testing FoodShare applicants will increase hunger in Wisconsin as deserving individuals, including those with no history of drug use, are discouraged from applying for this food assistance. We are particularly concerned that children and others who depend on these adults will suffer repercussions if their loved ones struggle to retain benefits and sobriety.
- Experience in other states demonstrates that this type of drug testing is expensive to administer, identifies few instances of drug abuse, and ends up denying benefits to deserving individuals. If one of the goals of the state budget is to reduce waste and increase government efficiency, then the Legislature should not approve a new, inefficient, and costly program.

**Lifetime Wisconsin Works (W-2) limit.** Remove the provision to reduce the W-2 lifetime limit from 60 months to 48 months because it imposes excessive hardship on those who struggle to become self-sufficient, even in a healthy economy. The 60-month limit should be retained, especially when our definition of “full employment” still leaves so many out of work and when frequent disruptions, which characterize our modern economy, mean that more Americans will find themselves out of work more often over their lifespans.

**BadgerCare non-disabled childless adults.** Remove the provision requiring the Department of Health Services (DHS) to seek a federal waiver requesting the authority to impose monthly premiums on non-disabled, childless adult BadgerCare recipients. These recipients have annual incomes of less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level (less than \$11,770 for one person). Requiring premiums of such poor individuals is unjust.

The budget would also institute drug and health screenings for these childless adults as a condition of eligibility. Again, a person with drug addictions is more likely to overcome her addiction if she has access to health care. Finally, as with the W-2 program, we oppose the reduction from 60 months to 48 months.

## **ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE ADDED**

**Medicaid expansion.** While not in the budget, the WCC supports accepting federal funds available to Wisconsin under the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). Not only would this provide health coverage to more people of limited means, but it would make needed General Purpose Revenue (GPR) funds available for other pressing needs.

We recognize that some are concerned that federal funds for Medicaid expansion may be reduced or eliminated in future years, leaving the state to pay for the program in its entirety. Leaders of Catholic schools in the parental choice programs confront this possibility every day, as do our Catholic Charities agencies when they contract with the state or county to provide human services. Wisconsin is clearly better off because these private institutions and many others have accepted the responsibility to help those in need, using all the resources that are available to them. We simply ask that our state government do the same.

**Juvenile Justice.** The WCC supports returning first-time, nonviolent 17-year-old offenders to the juvenile justice system. Because the adolescent brain is still being formed, the age appropriate programming found in the juvenile system is the best means to rehabilitate a young offender. Adolescents are far more likely to reoffend, be victimized, or attempt suicide when they are housed in adult institutions.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Please contact your legislators to support the positions identified above.

To contact your State Senator or Representative, visit the Wisconsin State Legislature website at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov> and click on “Find My Legislators,” or call the State Legislative Hotline, 1-800-362-9472.