

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

CAPITOL UPDATE

February 16, 2007

Contents Include:

1. Overview of 2007 State Budget
2. Reminder: Register Soon for Catholics at the Capitol
3. Upcoming Hearings of Interest
4. New Bills of Interest

2007-2009 Budget Introduced

Governor Doyle presented his two-year state budget on February 13th. Like all budgets, this one will be debated and amended by the legislature over the next several months before it is approved around July 1st.

Following is a short summary of some items of interest to the WCC.

Education

Parental Choice. The budget modifies the manner in which the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is financed in order to reduce the burden on Milwaukee property taxpayers by about \$21 million over the biennium.

Additionally, the budget also funds a fiscal auditor for the program to review the financial audits of participating schools. The cost of this position is to be funded by a fee assessed on all participating school choice institutions.

School Breakfast. The budget proposes a 50 percent increase in the state's reimbursement rate for school breakfast as a means of fostering increased use of the school breakfast program. Currently, Wisconsin ranks last in the nation in terms of school breakfast participation. While the program has been implemented the same as in other states, only 26 percent of students eligible to participate utilize the breakfast program.

Corrections

The budget includes a number of initiatives that are consistent with the proposals in the WCC statement on criminal justice to prefer community-based treatment to long-term incarceration for non-violent and youthful offenders. The budget:

1. Creates an Earned Release Review Commission so that non-violent felons who have served 75% of their sentence can be released from prison or community supervision.
2. Provides \$1 million for Project New Hope, a jobs program for released offenders in Milwaukee.
3. Provides \$750,000 for Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) to help non-violent offenders with drug addictions in Milwaukee.
4. Creates of a Truth-in-Sentencing Commission to propose clear sentencing guidelines to the legislature.
5. Provides \$3.4 million for medical and mental health treatment for women at Taycheedah.

Medicaid

The budget largely exempts funding cuts for programs targeted to the needy. It also includes a number of initiatives to provide access to affordable health care for underserved populations by:

1. Expanding of BadgerCare Plus to provide coverage for individuals with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Expansion also includes:
 - a. Starting January 2009, provide health care package for childless adults with incomes at or below 200 percent of federal poverty level.
 - b. Starting January 2008, the state will offer coverage to families, caretaker relatives, and pregnant women through a sliding scale fee program.
2. Extending Medicaid coverage for youths exiting the foster care system up to age 21.
3. Expanding the Family Care program and long term care ombudsman programs.

Children and Families

The budget proposes several initiatives to assist low-income families and other families with special needs:

1. Extends the period during which single parents in the Wisconsin Works program (W-2) may remain home with newborns before returning to work from 12 to 26 weeks.
2. Provides cash assistance to unmarried, pregnant women with no other custodial children in the W-2 program who are in the third trimester of a medically verified, at-risk pregnancy and are unable to work.
3. Creates a childcare quality rating system and helps to finance early childhood

education degrees.

4. Includes \$1 million in additional funding for homeless shelters in Wisconsin. This doubles the amount of money for this purpose
5. Creates an affordable housing trust fund.

Resident Tuition for Undocumented Immigrants

The budget permits foreign-born persons to pay in-state tuition if they meet three requirements: 1) they graduated from a Wisconsin high school or received a high school GED; 2) they have been continuously present in Wisconsin for at least three years following the day they enrolled in a Wisconsin high school; and 3) they provide the college or university with a written affidavit showing that they intend to apply for a permanent resident visa.

Domestic Partnership Coverage for State Employees. The budget provides health insurance coverage for state employees with domestic partners.

Looking Ahead

WCC will provide additional details on the budget and information about advocacy priorities and budget hearings in future updates.

Still Time to Register for Catholics at the Capitol, but Don't Delay!!

The 2007 *Catholics at the Capitol* will feature:

- Nationally recognized keynote speaker, Deirdre McQuade, from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, talking about a scriptural model for engaging life issues with compassion, respect, and generosity.
- Special breakout session for students with discussion on faithful citizenship led by Archbishop Dolan, Bishop Morlino, and student speakers.
- A panel discussion with Archbishop Dolan, Bishop Morlino, former Lt. Governor Margaret Farrow, and former Milwaukee District Attorney E. Michael McCann. Hear ideas on how Catholics can effectively participate in public life.
- Plus breakout sessions on a host of issues including Catholic social teaching, immigration, health and long-term care, criminal justice, homelessness, poverty, lending, farm initiatives, and more!

Catholics *at the Capitol*

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Monona Terrace Convention Center, Madison

9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Don't miss out! Register now.

Call the Wisconsin Catholic Conference at (608) 257-0004,
or go online at www.wisconsincatholic.org, to register today!

Upcoming Hearings of Interest

Finance Co-Chairs Announce Cities for Public Hearings

Joint Committee on Finance Co-Chairs Russ Decker (D-Weston) and Kitty Rhoades (R-Hudson) announced the cities, dates and times for the committee's six public hearings on the biennial state budget:

Milwaukee	10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 20.
De Forest Area	10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 21.
Chippewa Falls	12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, March 27.
Prairie du Chien	12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 4.
Rhineland	12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 11.
Green Bay	10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Thursday, April 12.

Specific facility locations for each hearing will be released in the near future.

New Bills of Interest

SB-40. STATE BUDGET (Gov. Doyle) The executive budget act of the 2007 legislature. To Joint Finance.

Web Sites of Interest

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/waml>

- Who are my legislators

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/leginfo.html>

- 2007-08 Session Schedule
- Weekly Schedule of Committee Activities
- Senate and Assembly Daily Floor Calendar

Capitol Update is a periodic e-mail on legislative issues from the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. To "subscribe" or "unsubscribe" please send a request to office@wisconsincatholic.org.

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