

# WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

# CAPITOL UPDATE

May 29, 2009

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## Joint Finance Passes State Budget

On May 29, the Joint Finance Committee completed its work on the state budget on a party-line vote of 12-4. The budget bill now goes to the Assembly, which is expected to take it up on June 9, 2009. Items of interest to the WCC are listed below. WCC staff will attempt to modify some of these provisions that remain unsatisfactory. Please watch for future updates.

### Children and Families

Community Aids. The Governor reduced the current level of state funding for the Community Aids program by 1% and did not offset the loss of about \$20 million in federal funds under the federal Title IV-E program. This is an important source of funding for Catholic Charities (CC), and the WCC is very concerned about the effect this reduction will have on the efforts of CC and other human service agencies to care for those in need.

- Joint Finance provided additional state and federal funds and reduced the \$20 million shortfall to \$6.9 million.

Child Care Rating System. The Governor included a quality rating system for child care providers receiving Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments so that parents can make informed choices. Child care centers not receiving the subsidy payments could be rated voluntarily.

- Joint Finance removed provision and requested that the Department of Children and Families return to the Committee with a specific plan for such a rating system.

Foster Care and Kinship Care. The Governor included a 5% increase in uniform foster care rates to take effect on January 1, 2010, and an additional 5% to take effect on January 1, 2011, and provided additional funding so that relatives can take care of children.

- Joint Finance increased foster care rates by 2.5% for relatives and by 5% for non relatives beginning on January 1, 2011.

Foster Parent Training. The Governor included over \$1 million distributed over the next two years to fund a statewide foster parent training program.

- Joint Finance approved the Governor's recommendation.

## **Corrections**

Criminal Justice Reform Initiative. The Governor included a number of provisions to redirect prison spending by reducing time spent in prison for certain non-violent offenders and by increasing the use of community corrections.

- Joint Finance revised the Governor's proposals to allow for early release of some non-violent offenders (excluding sex offenders) and to create other options for certain offenders to petition for reduction of sentence. They also included some additional funds for treatment programs though less than advocates had requested.

## **Elementary and Secondary Education**

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). The Governor included a number of provisions to increase regulation and accountability in the MPCP.

- Joint Finance made significant changes in the Governor's plan by eliminating the language related to open meetings laws and allowing for transfer of records to the Archdiocese if the parents agree. On the issue of mandatory testing, the Committee did not remove it, but added a provision that the mandate would not apply if the Superintendent of Public Instruction determines by January 1 that the current state test will no longer be used. Such a decision is considered likely. WCC staff, in conjunction with other Choice school advocates, is working further improve these provisions.

## **Health and Social Services**

BadgerCare Plus Coverage of Childless Adults. The Governor expanded coverage of childless adults (with incomes under 200% of federal poverty level) statewide on July 1, 2009. An estimated 41,000 childless adults will benefit from this coverage.

- Joint Finance approved.

BadgerCare Plus Program Eligibility. The Governor deleted the term "unborn child" from parts of the statute pertaining to program eligibility.

- Joint Finance approved.

Family Planning Waiver for Men. The Governor expanded eligibility for contraceptive services to men ages 15-44 that meet the specified qualifications of the Medical Assistance family planning waiver program.

- Joint Finance approved.

Children's Long-Term Support Program. Funded 1,000 slots over four years in the children's long-term support waiver program. The program provides Medicaid-eligible children with disabilities or severe emotional disturbances with at-home or community-based care. Currently, the waiting list for this program stands at over 3,500.

- Joint Finance approved.

### **The Wisconsin Works Program (W-2)**

W-2 Program Changes. The Governor adopted the federal 60-month time limit for W-2 assistance; removed the 24-month time limit on the amount of time a person may participate in any of the W-2 subsidized employment positions; and created a maximum 40-hour per week limit on participation in either educational and training activities, or work activities.

- Joint Finance approved.

W-2 Participants with Newborn Children. The Governor extended the time a woman who participates in the Wisconsin Works program may remain at home with her newborn from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

- Joint Finance removed.

W-2 Eligibility for Pregnant Women. The Governor extended eligibility for a monthly cash benefit payment to women with no other children who are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified at-risk pregnancy.

- Joint Finance approved with a minor modification.

Emergency Assistance. The Governor included additional \$1 million of federal funding for assistance to families facing a current emergency due to fire, flood, natural disaster, energy crisis, or homelessness.

- Joint Finance reduced amount to \$500,000 of federal funds.

### **Other**

Domestic Partnership Registry and Benefits. The Governor directed counties to permit same sex couples to register as domestic partners and set forth criteria for doing so. Those who register become eligible for some of the legally recognized prerogatives or benefits that currently accrue to married couples (and, in some instances, other relatives). Also included, a provision for the dissolution of such partnerships.

- Joint Finance approved but added a declaration of policy that nothing in the provision “shall be construed as inconsistent with, or a violation of, article XIII, section 13, of the Wisconsin Constitution,” which prohibits same-sex marriage.

Mandate on Pharmacies to Fill Prescriptions for Contraceptives. Not in Governor’s budget.

- Joint Finance approved a motion specifying that all pharmacies have the duty to dispense and deliver lawfully prescribed contraceptives to a patient without delay when presented with a valid prescription. No exemption was made for religious health care institutions. WCC staff is consulting with Catholic health leaders as to the impact of this provision.

Tax-Exempt Housing. Not in Governor's budget.

- Joint Finance modified current law clarifying the scope of the property tax exemption for housing projects. A preliminary analysis of the motion by an attorney for low-income tenants suggests that the motion is an improvement over current law as interpreted in Dane County and should help most tax-exempt properties, but may not help all of them.

Food Benefits for Qualified Aliens. The Governor eliminated FoodShare benefits (formerly known as food stamps) for legal immigrants and other qualified aliens.

- Joint Finance restored benefits.

Driver's Card for Undocumented Immigrants. Not in Governor's budget.

- Joint Finance approved a motion giving undocumented immigrants a driver's card for the purpose of lawfully driving an automobile or light truck, and obtaining auto insurance. The card could not be used to board an airplane or for other identification purposes.

Instate Tuition for Undocumented Students. The Governor provided that a person who is a citizen of another country is exempt from nonresident tuition if that person meets several requirements.

- Joint Finance approved.

Contracts for School Busing. Not in Governor's budget.

- Joint Finance approved a motion to allow a school district to offer parents with more than one child in a private school only one contract to pay for arranging their own transportation in lieu of receiving school busing services. The contract amount would be equal to either the average cost of busing a child or \$5 per mile, whichever is greater. WCC staff, in conjunction with other private school advocates, is working to revise or eliminate this provision.

State Public Defender Eligibility. Not in Governor's budget.

- Joint Finance approved a motion to increase the State Public Defender financial guidelines, which have not changed in 22 years, to model W-2 guidelines.

## **New Bills of Interest**

[SB-209.](#) **Beer Tax** (Risser) Increases beer tax to fund law enforcement grants as well as alcohol and drug abuse treatment and prevention programs. To Health, Health Insurance, Privacy, Property Tax Relief & Revenue.

[AB-277.](#) **Housing Discrimination** (Parisi) Prohibits discrimination in housing based on domestic abuse status. To Housing.

## Web Sites of Interest

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

- Who are my legislators

[Directory of Senate Members](#)

[Directory of Assembly Members](#)

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

- 2009-10 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.

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