

# WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

# CAPITOL UPDATE

June 12, 2009

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## **Assembly Set to Vote on Changes in State Budget**

Assembly Democrats reached agreement yesterday on an amended version of the state budget. Later today, they will debate amendments offered by Assembly Republicans and then vote on passage of the budget bill, Assembly Bill 75. The State Senate will then take up the bill next week and consider additional changes.

One of the changes made by the Assembly majority was to remove language protecting the tax-exempt status of low-income housing programs. The Democratic Caucus also lowered the current cap on enrollments in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) to 19,500 students. A provision requiring MPCP-participating schools to maintain a bilingual-bicultural education program was also altered, and would require MPCP schools to follow the same staffing regulations as required in public school districts.

The Assembly did not remove the “duty to dispense” mandate on pharmacies for prescribed contraceptives, which would include those pharmacies operated by Catholic hospitals. Nor did they remove the mandate that most health insurance plans include coverage for contraceptive services.

There is still time to contact legislators asking them to improve the biennial budget bill.

**Please urge your legislators, especially those Senators who will take up the budget bill next week, to act on the following:**

1. Remove the mandate that forces Catholic agencies to pay for contraceptive coverage in the health insurance plans they purchase.
2. Remove the mandate that pharmacies, including those owned by Catholic organizations, have a duty to dispense prescriptions for contraceptives.
3. Reject the Assembly amendment to cap enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program at 19,500 and retain the current cap of 22,500.
4. Preserve tax-exempt status for housing projects that serve low-income elderly residents and individuals with disabilities.

To learn who your legislators are, visit the Wisconsin State Legislature's website at <http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/>, or enter your zip code in the box located at the top of the WCC's [E-Advocacy](#) website.

## **WCC Issues Action Alert on Contraception Mandates**

The WCC this week issued an [Action Alert](#), urging citizens to oppose two provisions that were inserted in the Assembly version of the state budget bill.

The first provision would mandate that pharmacies, including Catholic pharmacies, have a duty to dispense prescribed contraceptive drugs or devices to a patient without delay.

The second provision would require many entities, including Catholic institutions, to offer contraceptive coverage as part of their employee health insurance policies. This provision would require health plans purchased by Catholic dioceses and agencies to provide coverage for prescribed contraceptives, and the outpatient services necessary to administer those items.

Since the budget bill has yet to pass both houses of the Legislature, readers are urged to contact their legislators, especially their Senators, asking them to remove these two provisions from the budget.

## **WCC Urges Support for Non-Profit Housing**

The Assembly majority removed a provision that would have allowed non-profit housing organizations that assist low-income tenants, including the elderly and people with disabilities, to retain their tax-exempt status. The WCC, in coalition with others, wrote a [memorandum](#) asking Assembly Democratic Caucus Members to restore language in the budget that would allow organizations to remain exempt from property taxes.

The problem stems from a recent Dane County Circuit Court ruling and an advisory opinion letter from the state Department of Revenue that give a very narrow definition of the "rent use" provisions in existing state law. The rent use language defines how rental income from property may be used.

The Court ruled that such income could only be devoted to maintenance and debt retirement. This is a standard few rental property owners can meet. Many providers of low-income housing in Madison may lose their tax-exempt status as a result, and it is likely that other cities will follow suit. Low-income housing programs around the state, such as those operated by Catholic Charities agencies, may be affected if this happens.

Please join the WCC and contact your legislators. Urge them to reinstate language in the budget that protects the tax-exempt status of non-profit, low-income housing providers.

## **WCC Asks Legislators to Remove Unfair Busing Provision**

The WCC also continues to urge legislators to eliminate a provision within the budget that would restrict the amount of transportation funding allotted to larger families whose children attend the

same nonpublic school. Under this provision, school districts that withdraw busing services for families who have two or more children attending the same nonpublic school building would be allowed to offer that family a single transportation contract. The family would receive a contract amount equal to the average cost of busing one child in the district, or \$5 a mile, whichever is greater. Families would have to find transportation for four children with the budget for one.

The WCC issued a [memo to legislators](#) and a [press release](#) explaining how this provision unfairly targets large, private school families.

## **New Bills of Interest**

[AB-287](#). **Beer Tax** (Berceau) Increases beer tax. To Public Safety.

[AB-296](#). **Children** (Legislative Council) Children and families involved in two or more systems of care. To Children & Families.

[AB-297](#). **Children** (Legislative Council) Child abuse and neglect prevention grants. To Children & Families.

[AB-298](#). **Children** (Legislative Council) Notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody. To Children & Families.

[AB-310](#). **Title Loans** (Zepnick) Regulates motor vehicle title loans. To Financial Institutions.

[AB-311](#). **Payday Loans** (Zepnick) Regulates payday loans. To Financial Institutions.

## **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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