



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, STATE BUDGET CAN HELP WOMEN CHOOSE LIFE

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

Budgets are mostly about numbers. Numbers of taxes collected and numbers of dollars spent. But budgets are also fundamentally about people and the priorities of the community. In ways large and small, budgets can affirm values, and arrange laws and policies in ways that favor personal choices.

Budgets are generally not the place to settle questions like whether abortion should be legal. But individual budget items can encourage or discourage women who are facing the choice of whether to carry a pregnancy to term and give life to the child they carry.

The 2009 budget bill includes some items that can foster choices in favor of life. Following are two of them.

Foster care and kinship care. The budget includes a 5% increase in uniform foster care in each year, and also boosts funding for kinship care. Foster care and kinship care are vital to children whose parents cannot care for them. In this context, support for foster parents and relatives who provide child care are good investments in pro-life policies.

W-2 eligibility for women in the third trimester of an at risk pregnancy. Under current law, a woman with no other children may not receive grants under the Wisconsin Works program (W-2) until a child is born. The budget extends this eligibility to women who are in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified at-risk pregnancy. If women sometimes feel pressured to abort because their health is at risk, the help available from the Wisconsin Works program can be critical to her choosing life. It also improves the baby's chance for a healthy birth.

For years Wisconsin's abortion rate has been well below the national average. Reasons for this vary, including pro-life laws regarding parental consent, informed consent, and our ban on funding abortion. But it seems reasonable to suggest that our better than average "safety net" for women and families in need is also a factor. These provisions, by themselves, will not end all abortions in Wisconsin. But to the extent that our budget funds programs for women in difficult circumstances and helps her or others care for her children, we can make abortion less likely.

At the same time, one part of the budget needs fixing.

The budget also removes the term "unborn child" from the statute defining eligibility for

BadgerCare. This is unfortunate. Any recognition of unborn children in Wisconsin law should be retained, because all human life – no matter at what stage or in what condition it is in – is deserving of recognition, respect, and protection. Retaining the current statutory language also affirms that the unborn child has a claim on health care.

In his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, Pope John Paul II discussed the concept of “shared responsibility” for abortion. He said that this responsibility fell not only on the pregnant woman, but also on others, including society. He specifically noted that a “general and no less serious responsibility” falls on those “who should have ensured – but did not – effective family and social policies in support of families, especially larger families and those with particular financial and educational needs.” (#59)

These items won't end the abortion debate. But taken together, they will send the message that the community is willing to do more to meet its “shared responsibility” to help prospective parents choose life.

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