

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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HERE AND IN OTHER STATES, CATHOLIC CONFERENCE LOBBY LEGISLATORS

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

The springtime of the year is a season for debates over state budgets. Here, as in other places, State Catholic Conferences are part of the conversation. And here, as in other states, the issues of concern to State Catholic Conferences don't fit neatly into the conventional liberal-conservative categories.

In Wisconsin, the WCC backs the Governor's recommendations regarding the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and his proposal to remove the mandate that health insurance policies include contraceptive services coverage, even when religious organizations do not want to purchase such coverage. The WCC also supports budget provisions that limit or end funding for family planning programs, but also urges that those funds be redirected to programs that help pregnant women and their children.

At the same time, the WCC opposes parts of the budget that reduce or limit tax credits targeted to the needy through the Homestead Tax Credit program and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The WCC also opposes cuts to needy families in the Wisconsin Works program, and is opposed to cuts in Medicaid enrollment and other programs that target the needy.

This blend is similar to budget-related advocacy by Catholic organizations in other states.

In Texas, the bishops joined with other faith leaders in exhorting the Legislature to look at budget choices "from the bottom-up, by protecting and defending the life and dignity of the poorest and most vulnerable, who have little legislative presence or representation." In language very similar to the WCC's 2011-13 Biennial Budget "Issue Brief," the Texas statement affirms that "a fundamental moral measure of our state's budget and economic policies is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of those most in need."

The Texas statement goes on to say that "state government has a vital role to play in providing for the common good by ensuring access to certain basic services for those in need." It also endorses "a balanced approach to crafting the state budget that includes a clear priority for poor families and vulnerable workers and appropriate new investments and sources of revenue."

In Michigan, the Catholic Conference is also trying to protect the Earned Income Tax Credit program from budget cuts. The Conference also goes on to say, "Just as protecting the EITC and maintaining funding levels for necessary state programs are critical, the Conference will also pursue policies that uphold the dignity of the human person, promote educational choice, grant

preferential options to the poor and vulnerable, guarantee religious freedom, support the traditional family structure, and encourage restorative justice.”

In Massachusetts, a Catholic Conference statement on the economy includes a public plea “that in the decisions facing our elected officials, and in the discussions and actions of all citizens, there be preserved, for the sake of human dignity, a special place and regard for the vulnerable.”

The words may differ and specific priorities may vary. However, these statements and others like them across the country remind us all that the Catholic message transcends parties and defies conventional political labels. In a period of intense partisanship, when too many embrace a “you are either with us or against us” mentality, the tenets of Catholic teaching and our commitment to framing discussion in light of the dignity of the person and the common good offers something different.

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