



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: State Representative Don Pridemore, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on Education Reform

FROM: Kim Wadas, Associate Director *Kimberly A. Wadas*

DATE: January 8, 2008

RE: Assembly Bill 637, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program Expansion

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) strongly supports Assembly Bill 637, which would allow more families, and their high school aged students, to utilize the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).

Our support for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is grounded in a long-standing principle that parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents educate their children daily, teaching and sharing with them the life skills needed to live as responsible members of society. As Catholics, we believe public policies should affirm the vital role of parents in their children's education by giving them meaningful choices in where and how their children are educated.

Our Catholic tradition also includes a call to exercise a "preferential option for the poor." This principle is advanced when those of limited means are empowered with the ability to exercise their rights in the same manner available to other citizens who enjoy more material resources. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, targeted to low-income families, is an example of such an option. The program gives parents the ability to exercise their basic rights and guide their children's education without discrimination.

By giving eligible students important new options, AB 637 ensures that all parents and guardians within the City of Milwaukee are given the opportunity to fulfill their role as primary educator. AB 637 would allow eligible students in the City of Milwaukee to attend any religious or independent school serving grades 9-12 in Milwaukee County. Hundreds of low-income high school students living in the City of Milwaukee remain outside the Choice Program because the only religious or independent school that could realistically serve them is located in a nearby suburb.

Facilitating the ability of these schools to accept voucher students provides yet another way to bridge the divides of geography, economics, and race, and foster diversity in the greater Milwaukee area.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this proposal and urges you to support Assembly Bill 637.