



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Luther Olsen, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Kim Wadas, Associate Director

DATE: May 25, 2011

RE: Assembly Bill 94, Changes to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference urges your support for Assembly Bill 94, which streamlines administration of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), ensuring consistent and efficient operation of the MPCP in all participating schools.

The MPCP has been in place for over twenty years and currently 30 Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee are responsible for educating approximately 10,200 MPCP students. As supporters of the MPCP, our administrators, staff, and families are continually in search of ways to improve the MPCP and foster changes that simplify the administration of the MPCP, for both participating schools and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), while maintaining high educational standards for students.

The program efficiencies proposed in AB 94 will eliminate certain redundancies in MPCP administration, allowing schools to focus more resources on student performance and achievement. AB 94 also allows schools to demonstrate fiscal viability and accountability in a more uniform manner, making certain all schools are being held to the same high standards.

By allowing families to apply for the MPCP on one form for all students within a family, AB 94 retains program accountability by ensuring that sibling application information is uniform. The proposed change also allows both MPCP school administrators and the DPI to more quickly review and process application information by centralizing applicant information for multiple students on one form rather than providing identical forms and information over and over again.

This legislation also permits MPCP participating schools to better facilitate their fiscal operations. By issuing one payment for all MPCP pupils attending a private school directly to the school, distinguishing payments for summer school participants, and codifying how schools may calculate certain operating expenses, AB 94 provides clarity and certainty for administrators as they maintain current compliance and plan for future budgetary needs. By coupling these changes with nationally approved auditing standards, AB 94 ensures universal and uniform program compliance.

Finally, AB 94 now includes language adopted by the Assembly that would allow a family that has met initial program income eligibility requirements to continue participation in the MPCP

regardless of income. Currently, families must annually demonstrate their household income, making the enrollment process tedious and increasingly complex, especially for families who may reside in a multi-family situation. Delays in obtaining documentation demonstrating income, errors in filing the application, and language barriers can affect the timely verification of household income that is required to ensure enrollment of a MPCP student. These delays can hazard a student's ability to continue in the program. Though generally little changes from year to year, MPCP families and schools spend countless hours re-verifying household income information. By allowing families to remain in the program after an initial income assessment, AB 94 eliminates an unnecessary burden for both families and schools, and ensures students are provided continuity in their educational experience.

Thank you for opportunity to provide testimony on this proposal. The WCC urges your support for Assembly Bill 94.