



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Budget Conference Committee

FROM: John Huebscher, Executive Director

DATE: July 23, 2007

RE: Budget Issues of Concern to the Wisconsin Catholic Conference

As you take up the important work of resolving the different versions of the state budget, the WCC urges you to develop a document that advances the priorities of protecting human life, promoting family life, and pursuing social justice, especially for the most vulnerable residents of our state. To this end, we make the following recommendations:

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- ***Shelters for the Homeless.*** The test of any budget is how it addresses the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens. Homeless people are in that category. Since there is an especially pressing need for homeless shelters and affordable housing that will take women and children, we urge that \$1 million be allocated for this type of housing.
- ***W-2 Benefits for Pregnant Women.*** We favor birth over abortion when we help women to carry their children to term in the most difficult circumstances. The budget should provide cash assistance to unmarried pregnant women who have an at-risk pregnancy and therefore cannot work.
- ***Wisconsin Shares.*** Society values parents when it helps them balance work and child rearing. Financial assistance for childcare is an important means of doing that. We urge you to fully fund Wisconsin Shares and ensure that there are no waiting lists or higher co-pays.

CORRECTIONS

- ***Earned Release Review Commission.*** Nearly all prisoners will return to the community some day. Encouraging them, while still in prison, to work toward their early release benefits everyone. Include the Earned Release Review Commission, so that deserving inmates may have their sentences reduced.
- ***Treatment and Diversion Programs.*** Most experts agree that treating addictions in prisons either isn't happening or is ineffective. Community based programs, by contrast, save money and change lives. We urge you to make sure the budget allocates more funds for community based drug and alcohol treatment and prison diversion programs.
- ***Medical Services for Women in Prison.*** Incarcerated women have higher rates of mental and medical problems than incarcerated men, yet in Wisconsin too many incarcerated women lack proper treatment. Given that the female prison population is growing, it is important that the budget include additional funds for medical and mental health for women at Taycheedah.

- ***Legal Services to the Indigent.*** In a nation built on laws, the poor must have equal access to justice. Provide \$1 million to organizations that provide civil legal services to the poor.

EDUCATION

- ***Parental Choice.*** Parents are the primary educators of their children. Low-income parents deserve the same educational options as middle class parents. Thus we support the modest extension of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to Racine and to high schools in Milwaukee County.
- ***SAGE.*** The bi-partisan agreement that raised the cap on the choice program also included a commitment to increase support for SAGE. The Joint Finance version of the SAGE program better reflects the spirit of that agreement and we urge its inclusion in the budget.
- ***Chapter 220.*** While Chapter 220 by itself cannot assure equal educational opportunity, it does considerable good. Policies to alter or replace the program should be made only after careful deliberation, and we therefore ask that you not eliminate funding for Chapter 220 in this budget.
- ***Job Bias against Offenders.*** Work is essential to human dignity and, therefore, employment discrimination should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Current law permits schools to avoid hiring convicted felons if the offense is related to the job. Thus we urge that you not include the provision that permits educational institutions to terminate or not hire unpardoned felons when their crime bears no relation to their job. Not only does this provision discourage ex-offenders from leading productive lives, it will also disproportionately harm members of minority groups.

HEALTH CARE

- ***Access to Health Care.*** Health care is a basic human right, an essential safeguard of human life and dignity. The WCC has not endorsed any of the various health care plans put forth in the budget process. However, we urge you to craft a budget that significantly expands the number of Wisconsin residents who have ready access to affordable health care. As you do so, we urge you to make sure any proposal you endorse respects human life from conception until natural death.
- ***Coverage of Youth Exiting Foster Care.*** Children and youth in foster care often remain needy into adulthood. The WCC urges you to extend Medicaid coverage to youths exiting foster care up to age 21. Doing so gives them additional time to find suitable health coverage on their own.
- ***Funding of Abortion Providers.*** Though abortion is legal, public funds should not be used to subsidize those who provide abortions or counsel women to have abortions. We support the Assembly provision that prevents DHFS and counties from funding organizations that counsel or provide abortion. The state's limited resources are better used to provide services to pregnant women so that they can adequately care for their children or place them in loving adoptive homes.
- ***Family Planning Waiver.*** The WCC recognizes that not everyone agrees with our views on contraception. But many do agree that giving contraceptives to minors without their parents' consent is not good family or public policy. Accordingly, we urge you not to expand the Family Planning Demonstration Project to include males. Nor should the Project provide services to anyone under the age of 18.