



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members of the Legislature

FROM: John Huebscher

DATE: June 2, 2009

RE: The Budget and Busing Children in Religious and Independent Schools

An amendment added to the state budget would put transportation for Catholic school families and others who attend religious and independent schools at risk. This proposal jeopardizes safe transportation for school children across the state, and we ask that it be removed from the budget.

School districts in Wisconsin are required to provide transportation services to all students, both public and nonpublic. The law also allows for a parent transportation contract in lieu of busing services if the cost of busing a nonpublic student is 1.5 times the district's average cost per pupil. This is reasonable.

Under the new budget provision, school districts would be allowed to withdraw busing services for families who have two or more children attending the same nonpublic school building and offer them a single transportation contract in its place. The family would receive a contract amount equal the average cost of busing one child in the district, or \$5 a mile, whichever is greater.

Larger families with less flexible work schedules, those who live in small towns and rural areas far from school, or families that pay per child for transit services would face a special burden. Families would have to find transportation for four children with a budget for one. This is not reasonable.

In addition to the issues of safety and fairness, the proposal is unsound on environmental grounds as it results in the use of additional fuel. Most children who attend Catholic schools and other nonpublic schools live on the same bus routes as public school children. Using buses on these routes reduces fuel consumption.

Consider the case of one school bus transporting the children of five Catholic school families on the same bus route as used for public school students. Under the contract approach, five separate cars will have to make two round trips a day to transport the same 10 children. With fuel prices heading back to \$3 a gallon and government leaders urging us to find ways to reduce the use of gasoline, this idea is as bad for the environment as it is for families.

For all these reasons, we ask that you delete this provision from the budget.