



2009 BIENNIAL BUDGET BILL

INTRODUCTION

In February, Governor Doyle introduced his proposed biennial state budget for 2009-11 (Assembly Bill 75). Between now and July, the legislature will review the Governor's proposal, as modified by the Joint Committee on Finance, and consider amendments to it.

BUDGETS FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

While government budgets are laden with numbers, statistics, and estimates, fundamentally they are about people and the priorities of the community. And while the Wisconsin Catholic Conference does not take a position on the budget as a whole, the Conference does urge Catholics to assess budgets in light of their impact on the common good, the extent to which they exercise a preferential option for the poor, and the degree to which they foster solidarity among the citizens of our state.

Based upon these broad principles, the WCC has identified six areas of interest and concern in the Governor's budget.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

Maintain Funding for Programs Targeted to the Needy

Programs that provide services to needy individuals and their families are always a priority for the WCC. Among these are the Community Aids program through which the state helps counties fund locally-based human services programs, and medical assistance programs, such as Medicaid, BadgerCare, and BadgerCare Plus. These services provide vital programs to persons with disabilities, elders, and low-income families.

The Governor's budget spares most of these programs from spending cuts, however, legislators may face pressure to cut these programs in order to fund other priorities. Any economic downturn imposes pain and suffering. Yet one constant in such difficult times is that those with the least tend to lose the most. It is precisely in these difficult times that we must affirm our commitment to the core principles that define who we are as a society. One of these core principles is that the poor have a special claim on the support and assistance of the community.

- *Urge legislators to retain state support for Medicaid, BadgerCare, BadgerCare Plus, Community Aids, the Wisconsin Works program (W-2), and other programs funded with medical assistance dollars.*

Support Healthy Births

Under current law, a woman with no children is not eligible for a monthly cash benefit payment under the W-2 program. The budget extends eligibility to women with no other children who are in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified at-risk pregnancy.

- *Urge legislators to retain this provision in the budget in order to protect mothers and their unborn children.*

The budget deletes the term “unborn child” from the BadgerCare Plus statute pertaining to program eligibility. If this happens, it could weaken the ability of a pregnant woman to obtain proper medical care for her unborn child, and it would diminish Wisconsin’s legal recognition of the unborn.

- *Urge legislators to retain the term “unborn child” in the BadgerCare Plus statute.*

Remove Family Planning Waiver Services for Males

The budget expands eligibility for contraceptive services to males, ages 15-44, who meet the specified qualifications of the Medical Assistance family planning waiver program. The state should not engage in the promotion of artificial contraception, especially when that includes the distribution of contraception to teens without parental knowledge.

- *Urge legislators to remove this provision from the budget.*

Assure Equitable Treatment of Schools in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP)

The budget includes a number of provisions to increase regulation and accountability in the MPCP. Some of these are problematic for Catholic schools in the program. While some additional accountability is appropriate, some of these provisions will undermine the mission of Catholic schools.

- *Urge legislators to remove or amend the MPCP accountability provisions from the budget and allow Catholic schools to continue helping needy students.*

Support A New Direction in Corrections Policy

The budget reduces reliance on longer prison terms for nonviolent offenders by transferring some offenders from prison to supervision in the community, and by allowing more nonviolent prisoners to earn early release. Both of these aims are consistent with the WCC’s 1999 statement on corrections.

- *Urge legislators to support the Governor’s efforts to redirect Wisconsin’s corrections policy.*

Remove the Provisions Related to Domestic Partnerships

The budget creates a “domestic partnership registry” that allows certain same-sex couples to be eligible for benefits or services (such as inheritance, family and medical leave, workers compensation, crime victim compensation, etc.) available to married couples. This provision invites a debate concerning how the law should accommodate people who are committed to each other’s care, but whom the law prevents from marrying. Such a debate is complex and not suited to inclusion in a budget. We need to be sure that such a provision does not have the effect of diluting the unique status marriage enjoys in our laws.

- *Urge legislators to remove this provision from the budget.*

ACTION REQUESTED

Write or call your legislator to support the positions identified above.

For more information, please contact the Wisconsin Catholic Conference at 608/257-0004.