



2019-21 STATE BUDGET BILL

INTRODUCTION

In February, Governor Evers introduced his proposed biennial state budget for 2019-21 (Senate Bill 59 and Assembly Bill 56). 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 the WCC does not take a position for or against the state budget as a whole, it recognizes that budgets are documents through which our state makes principled choices and sets priorities. The WCC therefore addresses budget measures that advance or hinder important ethical concerns. For Catholics, two vital principles are respect for the life and dignity of the human person and promotion of the common good. More specifically, every public policy should be measured by how it addresses the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized so that they can have the opportunity to lead dignified lives and participate as fully as possible in the life of the community. Several budget provisions uphold these principles and deserve to be included in the final document, while others do not and should be removed. Additionally, the WCC urges that one item be incorporated into the budget proposal.

BUDGET ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE RETAINED

Poverty

EITC Expansion. Expands the state's Earned Income Tax Credit, which benefits working parents with low incomes in tax year 2019 by increasing the EITC for parents with one child from 4 percent to 11 percent and from 11 percent to 14 percent for those with two children. A generous EITC has been shown to significantly reduce poverty.

Homelessness Initiatives. Incorporates the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recommendations for increased funding dedicated to helping Wisconsin residents obtain safe, affordable housing. In 2017, at least 21,000 people were experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin, 17,905 people stayed in emergency shelters, and at least 3,470 people were sleeping in places not meant for human habitation.

Immigration

Immigrant Driver's Cards. Allows undocumented residents to obtain a noncompliant REAL ID driver's license or identification card. Under the federal "Real ID" Act, states may issue driving certificates, which cannot be used for federal identification, but which can be used to get car insurance, etc. Having valid identification increases safety on roads and in the community.

Health

Medicaid Expansion. Uses federal funds under the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) to expand Medicaid to cover all low-income residents who earn up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (\$34,638 in 2019 for a family of four). Not only would this provide comprehensive health coverage to more people of limited means, but it would make needed General Purpose Revenue (GPR) funds available for other pressing needs.

Criminal Justice

Juvenile Justice. Returns 17-year-old offenders to the juvenile justice system in 2021. Because the adolescent brain is still being formed, the age-appropriate programming found in the juvenile system is the best means to rehabilitate a young offender. Adolescents are far more likely to reoffend, be victimized, or attempt suicide when they are housed in adult institutions.

Treatment and Reentry. Provides \$1 million annually to continue and expand the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion program and \$250,000 annually to expand the Windows to Work program, which provides services before and after incarceration to limit recidivism. Provides \$3,926,500 in 2019-20 and \$3,901,600 in 2020-21 to expand the Opening Avenues to Reentry Success program statewide and to increase the number of participants in each county. With over 23,000 incarcerated residents, many of whom will be returning to the community, Wisconsin must dedicate resources to successful treatment and reentry.

Education

Education Funding. Restores the two-thirds state funding commitment for public schools and allows schools with full-day four-year-old kindergarten to count these pupils as full-day students in 2020-21. Local prosperity, or lack thereof, should not dictate the quality of education. The state should make certain that families and schools have the resources necessary to provide a quality academic experience.

BUDGET ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE REMOVED

Funds to Abortion Providers. Repeals the prohibition on Title V, Title X, and Women's Health block grant funding to an entity that provides abortion services or is affiliated with an organization that provides abortion services. This prohibition ensures that women's health care is devoted to prevention, diagnosis, and care, not the termination of life.

Educational Choice. Parents must have the community's support in selecting a form of education that best meets their child's needs – academic, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical. Catholic social teaching on the preferential option for the poor requires that educational choices by families of modest means be supported, not limited. Educational opportunities should be a reality for all children, not just for those whose families can afford them. For these reasons, the following should be removed from the budget:

- Eliminating the K-12 private school tuition tax deduction
- Freezing Parental Choice Program beginning in the 2020-21 school year
- Banning new enrollment in the Special Need Scholarship Program beginning in 2020-21

ITEM THAT SHOULD BE ADDED

Adoption Tax Credit. Creates a nonrefundable individual state income tax credit for qualified adoption expenses. Wisconsin can protect unborn children, give hope to birthmothers, and build new families by enacting a state income tax credit for adoption expenses that makes adoption more affordable.

ACTION REQUESTED

Please contact your legislators to support the positions identified above.

To contact your State Senator or Representative, visit the Wisconsin State Legislature website at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov> and use the "Find Your Legislator" tool, or call the State Legislative Hotline, 1-800-362-9472.