



2021-23 STATE BUDGET BILL

In February, Governor Evers introduced his proposed 2021-23 state budget (SB 111/AB 68). Between now and July, the Legislature will modify the budget before sending it to the Governor for approval.

BUDGETS FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

For Catholics, every public policy should be measured by how it addresses the life and dignity of the human person, especially the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized, including those who suffer the injustice of racism. All must 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, others do not and should be removed.

BUDGET ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE RETAINED

DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Support for Pregnant Women and New Moms. Expands postpartum eligibility for women in the Medicaid program from 60 days to 12 months; provides grants to reduce racial disparities related to infant and maternal mortality; and ends the use of physical restraints on pregnant/postpartum incarcerated women. The overall infant mortality rate in Wisconsin is on the rise (6.1 deaths per 1,000) and above the U.S. average. More alarming, Wisconsin has the highest rate of infant mortality for non-Hispanic black women (14.28 deaths). Wisconsin must help all mothers and their children survive and thrive.

Homelessness Initiatives. Incorporates the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recommendations for increased funding dedicated to helping Wisconsin residents obtain safe, affordable housing. As of January 2020, Wisconsin had an estimated 4,515 experiencing homelessness on any given day. Safe and stable housing promotes family cohesion, student achievement, steady employment, and better health.

ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Medicaid Expansion. Uses federal Affordable Care Act funds to expand Medicaid to low-income residents who earn up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (\$35,245 in 2021 for a family of four). More vulnerable people would receive care and state funds could be diverted to address other priorities.

Mental Health. Increases K-12 and UW System mental health services funding, expands K-12 mental health collaboration grants, adds funding for suicide prevention, provides mental health assistance to farmers, and expands the Child Psychiatry Consultation Program for counties facing a shortage of psychiatrists. Mental wellness is essential to human flourishing.

JUSTICE AND MERCY

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

Treatment and Diversion. Expands the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion program, which diverts people from incarceration. Reducing incarceration is both humane and essential to economic growth.

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES

EITC Expansion. Expands the state's Earned Income Tax Credit by increasing the EITC for working

parents with one child from 4 percent to 11 percent and those with two children from 11 percent to 14 percent. An ample EITC has been shown to notably reduce poverty.

Broadband Access. Increases funding to expand broadband access into the state's unserved, rural areas. Broadband access is increasingly essential for quality education, health care, and economic development.

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 buy car insurance. Having valid identification increases safety on roads and in the community.

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

Special Education. Significantly increases special education aid so that all students, including those with special needs, receive the educational resources necessary to flourish.

School Nutrition. Funds school reimbursement rates under the school breakfast program as required by Wisconsin law, which would significantly increase aid to schools. Students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

CARE FOR CREATION

Clean Water. Funds the replacement of lead service lines and the repair or replacement of contaminated wells and aging septic systems. Access to clean water is critical to public health.

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 diverts money from prevention, diagnosis, and health care for women, and towards the taking of human life.

Gender-Neutral Language. Makes statutory references to marriage, spouses, and parentage gender-neutral and codifies same-sex marriage. Ignoring the biological reality of male and female in the law will hamper efforts to address issues impacting maternity, paternity, and the family. It will also drastically reduce the ability to track and assess health, demographic, other issues related to gender and the family.

Gender Identity in Employment. Expands the definition of employment discrimination to include discrimination based on gender identity/expression. All people must be treated with dignity and respect, but efforts to prevent discrimination cannot foster inequality and intolerance for practices grounded in biological reality. Employers must be allowed to serve and maintain privacy and safety without sanction.

Educational Choice. Restricts parental choice in education by:

- Limiting the K-12 private school tuition tax deduction to single/head of household filers with incomes below \$100,000 and married-joint filers with incomes below \$150,000.
- Capping enrollment for Parental Choice Programs beginning in the 2022-23 school year.
- Capping enrollment for the Special Needs Scholarship Program beginning in 2022-23.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and must have the right and the means to choose the school that best meets their children's needs.

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.