



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: April 10, 2025

RE: Opposition to Assembly Bill 163, Redeterminations of Eligibility for Medical Assistance

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On behalf of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, we respectfully urge you to oppose Assembly Bill 163, which limits access to health care, especially for those who most need it.

AB 163 is intended to prevent improper Medical Assistance (Medicaid) payments by:

- Prohibiting the automatic renewal of benefits for Medicaid recipients
- Requiring redetermination of eligibility every six months, if approved by the federal government
- Requiring information to be cross referenced between state agencies that collect financial data related to public assistance programs
- Requiring prompt removal of all ineligible individuals
- Removing individuals from the program for six months if they fail to report to any change that may change their Medicaid eligibility

We oppose this bill, as we have done in the past, because it would unfairly burden vulnerable individuals who are in need of health care. Public assistance programs exist to aid individuals and families whose situation prevents them from being able to meet basic needs.

Health care is a basic human right and access to health care for all has been a policy goal of the U.S. bishops since 1919. It is important to remember that those who currently receive Medicaid are individuals who have disabilities, are pregnant, have chronic conditions or diseases, and are children or adults living in poverty. By definition, they are in need of

services and do not have the resources necessary to receive treatment and medications without Medicaid.

These individuals and families struggle to meet basic housing, transportation, and other expenses. Out of necessity, they frequently must move from one home to another, as well as from one job to the next, changing addresses, phone numbers, and earnings along the way. By and large these individuals are trying to make ends meet, not defraud the government.

We are most concerned that AB 163 would require that the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) determine an individual's eligibility every six months. Currently, most Medicaid recipients must complete a program renewal at least once a year to determine ongoing program eligibility. While renewal is necessary and important, a six-month renewal will be burdensome on the state and on individuals, and likely result in individuals not having access to care when they most need it. The requirement will lead to missed deadlines, appointments, treatments, and medications, rather than a meaningful path towards greater health.

AB 163 also states that a failure to disclose information in a timely manner can result in a six-month suspension from the Medicaid program. We think this is unjust because it does not distinguish between a person who makes an innocent mistake and one who knowingly withholds information.

Finally, it is important to note the impact this bill will have on private charities. Depriving the poorest among us of health care will only shift the burden to private charities, Catholic and others. The Catholic Church is the largest private charity in the United States. But private charity cannot substitute for what only the public sector can do. Private charity cannot make up for the State's abdication of responsibility to assist the most poor and vulnerable.

In conclusion, reforming public assistance programs to reduce poverty, dependency, and inefficiency is a laudable goal. However, any program reforms must ensure that people in need do not become targets. Overly bureaucratic and punitive measures to ostensibly reduce fraud and encourage responsibility all too often have the opposite effect of increasing burdens and further impoverishing the most vulnerable. We urge that any changes to Medicaid prioritize access to quality care so that everyone can live a dignified life.

For all these reasons, we urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you.