On August 11, Bishop Robert Morlino of Madison and WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella each offered oral testimony in support of Assembly Bill 305 to the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. AB 305 would prohibit the sale and use of fetal body parts derived from an unborn child whose life is terminated by an induced abortion.

Bishop Morlino began his testimony by responding to the assertion of some medical professionals that use of aborted fetal body parts is essential to finding cures for devastating diseases. “If we generally share the goal of improving the health of the community, is that health limited to the physical health of this or that particular patient? Doesn’t the health of the community have something to do with its psychological health, with its spiritual health, and with the help of reasoned discourse?”

Paraphrasing Pope Francis, Bishop Morlino said that “to have credibility in promoting environmental stewardship, care, and awareness . . . you have to show the same respect for the ecology of human nature, for the ecology of the human being. And protecting the ecology of a human being certainly cannot include dismembering it carefully, so that it can be used for research or whatever.”

In her testimony, Sella explained that the sale of fetal tissue and organs is one more example of what Pope Francis has called the “throwaway culture, which has today enslaved the hearts and minds of so many.”

Sella also expressed concern “that the trade in fetal body parts depends on providing false or misleading information to young and vulnerable women about what will happen to their aborted children. How many of these women are truly consenting to what has become a lucrative trade?” she asked. “We see parallels here with the practice of harvesting adult organs from the poor in developing countries for the benefit of wealthier persons in the developed world.”

Assembly Bill 305 is authored by Representative André Jacque (R-DePere). The Committee passed the bill on September 9 and it now is available for a floor vote in the Assembly.

Readers are encouraged to contact their representatives, urging them to support this important legislation. Go to http://legis.wisconsin.gov/ and type in your home address under “Find My Legislators.”
Some years ago, a panelist at one of our Catholics at the Capitol events observed, “We do not take a stand on a given issue because we are Democrats or Republicans but because we are Catholic.” This nonpartisan tradition has served the WCC well over the years and it is one of the WCC’s greatest assets.

In our current moment of polarized politics such nonpartisanship is more important than ever, and expressing it in our advocacy can be challenging. This is especially the case when we choose to endorse or support a piece of legislation.

In past times of bi-partisan cooperation it was not unusual for a piece of significant legislation to enjoy support from members of both parties. In such cases, the WCC’s support for a given bill was not seen as support for either of the two major parties.

Today, that happens less often. Now it is unlikely for bills that address issues like abortion and assisted suicide to be co-sponsored by members of both parties. The same is true for proposals to raise the minimum wage or curb predatory lending practices.

In evaluating legislation, we at the WCC make every effort to focus on the content of the proposal not its sponsorship. We assess whether it is consistent with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and our legislative policy positions. Certainly we are aware of the sponsorship and the likelihood the bill will become law. But those don’t determine our stance. For even a bill that is doomed to fail provides a chance to witness our values and educate the public on the wisdom of the bill being offered.

In doing so, we trust that Catholics and others will understand that support for a bill does not translate into an endorsement of the sponsor’s party. We also trust that, over time, our approach of consistently applying principles that are not partisan can encourage others to do the same and encourage politicians to reach across the aisle more often.

WCC Opposes Payday Lending Expansion in State Budget

As the Legislature completed its work on the state budget, the WCC joined a coalition of 29 other faith groups, low-income advocates, and public interest lawyers and organizations in urging the Assembly to remove and Governor Walker to veto a set of sweeping budget provisions that would have significantly expanded the power of predatory payday lenders in Wisconsin.

The budget provisions in question would have given payday lenders the power to sell an unprecedented range of complex financial products, such as insurance, annuities and tax preparation services, to Wisconsin consumers. The provisions would also have allowed abusive high-interest lenders to exploit particularly susceptible individuals by operating within casinos and liquor stores, or by directly operating such establishments themselves.

“Every budget should be about allocating sufficient resources to help the needy lead healthy and dignified lives, not about legalizing predatory practices that further exploit them,” said WCC Executive Director John Huebscher.

Predatory lending practices have devastating results for individuals, families, and communities across Wisconsin. According to the Center for Responsible Lending, payday loan fees cost Wisconsinites over $22 million a year, and drain the state’s economy of over $5 million annually due to lost economic activity. Additionally, payday loans increase the likelihood of other financial harms, such as increased overdraft fees, delinquency on other bills, bank account closures, and even bankruptcy.

Governor Walker vetoed the provision.

Printed copies of the Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter on end-of-life health care decision-making and advance care planning, Now and at the Hour of Our Death, are again available. A single free copy can be obtained by contacting the WCC at 608-257-0004 or office@wisconsincatholic.org. Multiple copies are available for a $1.50 each.
The following is a summary of issues of greatest interest to the WCC in the 2015-17 biennial budget act.

**Foster Care.** The budget provides additional funding for out-of-home support for fostered youth up to age 21.

**Child Survivors of Sex Trafficking.** The budget provides $2 million in additional fiscal year (FY) 2016-17 funding to expand treatment services to sex-trafficked children.

**Survivors of Domestic Abuse.** The budget adds $5 million in FY 2016-17 to expand services to survivors of domestic abuse and their families.

**School Aids.** The budget retains the per pupil public school aid amount for FY 2015-16 and provides a per pupil aid increase of $100 in FY 2016-17.

**Rural School Aid.** The budget provides $4.2 million annually in sparsity aid for small districts and increases high-cost pupil transportation aid by $2.5 million annually.

**Parental Choice Program Expansion.** The budget removes the cap on the number of parental choice program participants, but limits participation in the statewide program to no more than one percent of any public school district’s prior year student enrollment. Beginning in the 2017-18 academic year, the cap will expand one percent per year until the enrollment limit reaches 10 percent and the cap is lifted entirely.

**School Accountability.** Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, all public, charter, and choice schools will be tracked and rated using a star rating system.

**Special Needs Scholarship.** The budget creates the Special Needs Scholarship Program, which starting in 2016-17 will allow certain families with special needs children to apply for a scholarship to attend an eligible public or private school.

**Drug Testing of Public Benefits Recipients.** The budget requires that applicants for certain public benefit programs complete a questionnaire about substance abuse and possibly submit to a drug test. Those who test positive will be directed to drug treatment and will continue to be eligible for benefits. However, after two subsequent drug test failures, they will no longer be eligible for the public benefits.

**Expansion of Transitional Jobs Funding.** The budget provides an additional $1 million in FY 2015-16 and $2 million in FY 2016-17 for transitional jobs.

**FoodShare Employment and Training.** The budget provides over $7 million in FY 2015-16 and over $30 million in FY 2016-17 for the FSET program, which assists able-bodied adults without dependent children who receive FoodShare to build job skills and find work.

**Day of Rest Exemption.** The budget permits an employee to state in writing that he or she voluntarily chooses to work without at least 24 consecutive hours of rest in seven consecutive days.

**Medicaid.** The budget allocates over $650 million in additional Medicaid funding over the biennium, mostly to cover the costs of continuing current programs and services.

**Family Care.** The budget requires that the state Department of Health Services (DHS) submit to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services a request to expand statewide the Family Care program, a community-based, long-term care program for low-income elderly and individuals with disabilities. The DHS must also request changes to the Family Care and IRIS (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct) programs.

**Medicaid Childless Adults.** The budget requires DHS to seek a federal waiver requesting the authority to impose monthly premiums on non-disabled, childless adult Medicaid recipients. It will also institute drug and health risk screenings and a 48-month enrollment limit on these recipients.

**Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs.** The budget expands Medicaid coverage to residential-based substance abuse treatment services and consolidates certain mental health funds into the community aids program.

**Comprehensive Community Services Mental Health Benefit.** The budget provides an additional $26 million to fund the comprehensive community services mental health benefit.

**Children’s Community Options Program.** The budget creates a Children’s Community Options Program to provide long-term community support services to eligible children who have a disability.
U.S. Bishops Issue Labor Day Statement

Creating sufficient, decent work that honors the dignity of families is a necessary component of the challenge facing all Catholics, and it is the Catholic way, said the chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami cited the importance of work in supporting families in the 2015 Labor Day statement, issued on August 24.

Archbishop Wenski noted that even though work is meant for the sake of family, “Wage stagnation has increased pressures on families, as the costs of food, housing, transportation, and education continue to pile up.”

Archbishop Wenski said that, in Laudato Si’, Pope Francis challenges people to see the connections between human labor, care for creation, and honoring the dignity of the “universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect.”


Governor Signs Pain-Capable Act

On July 20, Governor Walker signed Senate Bill 179 (Senator Mary Lazich, R-New Berlin) into law as 2015 Wisconsin Act 56. Known also as the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, the new law prohibits abortions at and after 20 weeks so as to spare children the pain of being dismembered in the womb by means of a dilation and evacuation (D&E) abortion. The law also requires that women seeking abortions be orally informed of and provided with written materials on the availability of perinatal hospice, in addition to existing materials on agencies and services that provide assistance to pregnant and parenting women.

The WCC supported the bill along with Wisconsin Right to Life and prolife citizens across the state. WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella testified in support of the legislation, noting the spread of perinatal hospice programs around the country. The website www.perinatalhospice.org currently lists five such programs in Wisconsin.

“These hospice programs demonstrate how ready parents are to love and care for their fragile children to the very end of their natural lives,” she said.