



ARCHDIOCESAN COUNCIL OF MILWAUKEE
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

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Dear Legislator: (Insert EACH NAME)

THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, an international Catholic lay organization, has been active in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee since 1848. As such, it is one of the oldest charities and poverty fighters in Wisconsin. We are very concerned with the Governor's Budget as submitted by the Joint Finance Committee. Recommended cuts would affect many and create severe and additional hardships for all low-income people, most significantly for poorer women and children.

There are more than 6,000 volunteer members of the Society in Wisconsin alone. These volunteers, who are also citizens, literally "Walk with the Poor" by making numerous visits to the poor in their homes where they create relationships, and where trust and experiences are exchanged. They work at meal programs, food pantries, and at our Family Resource Center in the central city of Milwaukee. The Society's membership feels it is critical for us to voice a concern with and on behalf of the citizens of Wisconsin who will feel the impact of these budget cuts.

In 2004, we made 15,130 home visits in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and 141,442 people requested and received help from us. Our study of the proposed budget, combined with our daily contacts and relationships with the poor, leaves us with the following concerns:

- ◆ **The Governor's budget assumes that the W2 Employment caseload will drop over 40% in the next two years.** We feel strongly that this is unrealistic given the mismatch between those folks on W-2 and the requirements for employment in jobs that pay family sustaining wages. Requests to the Society for help because of poor wages and unemployment have risen. In 2004, the total amount of meals served at our sites was 156,001, up 35,000 from last year.
- ◆ **One cut that tears at the heart of our volunteers is the reduction in childcare funding.** We are convinced that the proposed severe childcare cuts will jeopardize the healthy development of many young children in our state. We believe it is wrong to cut \$1.8 million each year for the TEACH and REWARD Programs. We are concerned with the proposed \$725,000 cut annually from the \$1.2 million proposed for the Child Care Resource & Referral Network, the elimination of technical assistance of \$400,000 to providers, the 5 star quality Kids and tiered reimbursement, and the unrealistic increase for WI Shares co-pays by 15%. These cuts will have a negative impact resulting in poor childcare. We see first-hand through our visits and family support programs the urgency for high quality childcare networking. Children deserve childcare that prepares them for the future.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul does not believe that balancing the budget on the backs of the poor is an acceptable value and action for the citizens of Wisconsin. Dismantling this childcare network would significantly reduce the delivery of services.

Please do what you can to stop these cut!

We hear remarks from people similar to the following on a regular basis:

"I work full time at a fast food restaurant". . . . "I cannot afford rent so I sleep in a shelter . . ."
"I sleep on the floor with my three-year old." . . . "I don't think of myself as poor. . . I am working two jobs . . ."

Please remember the impact your decisions will have on these and other real people who need help.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Fahl
President, Archdiocesan Council

Rita Cannestra
Chair, Voice of the Poor Committee