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Dear Pastor:

We are writing to update you on our advocacy efforts for this year. The General Assembly passed a state budget on May 25th. In addition, the Emergency Budget Act was passed, which gives the Governor broad authority in making decisions about the budget, including holding back \$2 billion in state spending as reserves. This year's budget shortfall will be partially addressed through a tax amnesty program, borrowing against the state's portion of the national tobacco settlement, taking revenue from restricted state funds, and requiring some top state officials and agency employees to take furlough days and forgo cost of living pay increases.

As was the case last year, most funding in the budget was appropriated in lump-sum amounts. This means the Governor and state agencies (rather than legislators) would again make the final decisions about funding for individual programs and services. On July 1st, the Governor amendatorily vetoed the budget as passed by the General Assembly in order to implement a number of budget cuts, including cuts impacting programs important to Catholic schools and Catholic Charities.

- The Textbook Loan Program and the Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant are unfunded for Fiscal Year 2011.
- Funding for the Community Care Program, which helps seniors stay in their homes rather than entering nursing homes, was reduced.
- Budget reductions were also made relating to residential care for children and services for mental health and developmental disabilities. Other human services programs also will likely see cuts in their funding for Fiscal Year 2011.

In addition to issues relating to the state budget, over the course of the spring legislative session, a number of important issues were debated. We thank you for the discussions that many of you and your parishioners had with your state legislators on the issues on our legislative agenda at the second *Catholics at the Capitol* day last March in Springfield, as well as for your continued advocacy afterwards. Here is a brief update on our legislative agenda for this year:

- **House Bill 6205 (Reproductive Health and Access Act) – This legislation failed this session.** CCI opposed HB 6205, which represented a radical departure from current federal and Illinois law regarding abortion. Among its provisions, it would have taxpayer funding of abortion as well as mandate “comprehensive” sex education in every public school in the state. The bill passed the House Human Services Committee on March 26 but the bill lacked the requisite support to be called for a vote before the full House.
- **Senate Bill 2494 (Tuition Vouchers) – This bill passed the Senate but did not pass the House; we expect it to be reintroduced in 2011.** CCI supported this bill for parents in the lowest

performing and overcrowded schools in the City of Chicago to have the opportunity to receive tuition vouchers to send their child to a nearby nonpublic school, including our Catholic schools. While the bill did pass the Senate, the initial vote in the House failed. However, we will continue to advocate for this important bill, which we expect will be reintroduced next year.

- **House Bill 5743 (Ultrasound Opportunity Act) – This legislation did not receive a hearing but will be reintroduced in 2011.** HB 5743 would require abortion facilities to offer a woman seeking an abortion the opportunity to view her baby in a quality ultrasound. This year, the bill had 18 co-sponsors but was not heard in committee. We hope to reintroduce the bill next year.
- **Senate Bill 1716 (Civil Unions) – This legislation was not voted on but received an extended deadline.** CCI opposes this legislation, which would provide benefits, associated with marriage, to a civil union. A civil union is defined as a legal relationship between 2 persons of either the same or opposite sex. SB 1716 is able to be called for a vote in the House of Representatives at any time before the expiration of the current General Assembly (probably in January 2011). We will continue to oppose SB 1716 because, although called a civil union, this is same-sex marriage.
- **House Bill 5687 and Senate Bill 3569 (Death Penalty Abolition) – This legislation was not heard in committee but will likely be reintroduced.** CCI supports HB 5687 and SB 3569 to abolish the death penalty and replace death penalty sentences with terms of natural life imprisonment. Although neither bill received a committee hearing this spring, work towards abolition of the death penalty will continue.

These and other issues are also included in our more detailed legislative report available on our website - www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org – or call us for updates on these and other issues of importance. We must remain committed to continue the discussion of these critical issues with our elected officials. We again thank you for your support of our legislative agenda.

Sincerely,

The Catholic Conference of Illinois

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