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Illinois governor vetoes bill drastically cutting human services

Heidi Schlumpf | Jul. 2, 2009 NCR Today

The governor of Illinois yesterday vetoed [1] a proposed state budget that would drastically cut human services, a move applauded by many Catholics who have been protesting the cuts to services to the poor, developmentally disabled, children and seniors.

"The legislature decided to slash human services, the budget for the important programs that help vulnerable people, mostly people who have no lobbyists, who don't have political action committees, who don't have friends in high places, who have workers in their agencies that are receiving very modest salaries but they do it because they love the job, they love people," Gov. Pat Quinn said.

Instead, the governor is calling for a tax increase, which is opposed by leaders of the Democratic-controlled General Assembly. Many assembly members are promising an override of the governor's veto when they return to Springfield in two weeks to deal with the budget. Meanwhile, many social services agencies statewide have begun layoffs and started turning away clients.

At St. Gertrude Parish in Chicago (Disclosure: my parish), a letter was read at Mass last month asking parishioners to contact their representatives about cuts to a program for families with children who have developmental disabilities. "[We] have witnessed miracles in our home because of the Children's Waiver Respite Program," wrote Ann Wilson and David Newcorn. "It would be a disaster if [our daughter] is dropped from the program."

Members of the parish's Foster and Adoptive Families group joined several protests in downtown Chicago during the budget discussions. "We believe nurturing and safeguarding the fragile foster care system in Illinois is the first step toward adoption of our most vulnerable and neglected children," said Andrea Raila, who brought her seventh- and first-grader to the downtown Chicago rally several weeks ago. "This is the only way our elected leaders leaders and communities can visually measure the public's pulse and know how important government funding is for the neediest in our society."

The Catholic Conference of Illinois [2](CCI) agreed that some tax increase may be necessary but warned lawmakers not to overburden middle-class families. "CCI will not support any tax increase that does not provide prudential resources to human services, support families with children in nongovernmental as well as in public schools and carefully consider the tax burden being placed on working families," Executive Director Robert Gilligan wrote in a June 8 letter [3]to state representatives.

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