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Washington state bishops urge safety-net program funding

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Letters signed by Washington state's four Catholic bishops urging protection for "the poor and vulnerable" have been sent to all Washington state legislators as well as Gov. Jay Inslee.

Dated Tuesday, the letter calls on lawmakers to "consider the moral and human dimensions of state policy as you debate" the state's pending two-year budget, which is supposed to be finalized by the end of April.

Washington state faces up to a \$1.3 billion shortfall for its 2013-2015 budget. Negotiations have been made more tense by a Washington Supreme Court mandate that spending for K-12 schools be increased to meet a constitutional obligation to educate all children.

A Washington Senate budget proposal made public early this month proposed controversial cuts to social programs.

One hotly disputed cut would eliminate a program that provides cash aid to blind, disabled or older people who typically wait for approval of federal benefits. That budget would also cut \$180 million from state welfare programs, including child care for the working poor.

In their letter, the state's bishops wrote, "As Catholic pastors, we remind you that economic decisions possess a clear and compelling moral dimension. Funding for low-income families, the poor and homeless has been cut dramatically over the past four years, and we have a moral obligation to maintain an adequate safety net for programs that serve the most vulnerable among us."

The bishops specifically pleaded for continued funding for the state programs that:

- provide "a safety net for mentally or physically disabled persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness";
- subsidize "child care to low-income working parents and poor families"; and
- fund housing construction for those with low income.

The letter was signed by Archbishop J. Peter Sartain, Seattle archdiocese; Bishop Blase J. Cupich, Spokane diocese; Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, Yakima diocese; and Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of Seattle.

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