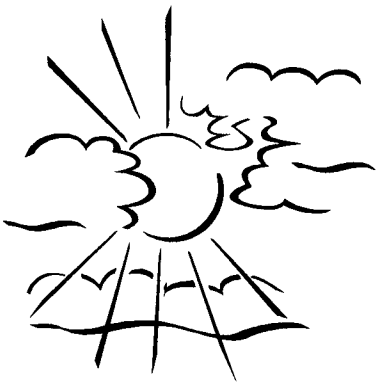
Department of Human Services

Prepared by the DHS Office of Communications (517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

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Michigan Report

May 18, 2006

HOUSE PASSES STRICTER WELFARE REFORMS

The House added more limitations and disqualifications for able-bodied adults seeking welfare assistance, as well as increased sanctions from 12 months to 24 months for people who violate work requirements, under a budget supplemental passed on a 64-39 vote Thursday.

The restrictions, which would apply only through the end of the current fiscal year, are part of a continuing push by Republicans to impose a lifetime limit of 48 months for receiving cash assistance as well as make it harder for individuals to obtain and stay on benefits unless they fulfill several requirements. Governor Jennifer Granholm, who has also indicated she would support a lifetime limit, had vetoed an earlier bill to impose similar limitations.

On Thursday, Granholm spokesperson Liz Boyd said that the governor continues to look forward to working with the Legislature on the issue and understands Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) has been shepherding the bill through the upper chamber.

Asked whether the House action was a step backward, Ms. Boyd said, "We're looking forward to it being in the Senate."

Although attempts to be even more restrictive by lowering the 48-month lifetime limit to 36 months and then again to 24 months failed on 46-57 and 27-74 votes, respectively, several other provisions were adopted with large majorities.

Rep. Chris Kolb (D-Ann Arbor) said the additional provisions only added up to harming the children who are also recipients of their parent's cash assistance from the state and that the Republican plan does not mean the state will meet federal work requirements, and if that's the case, "Then all it does is punish the people who have been on consecutively. These are not individuals, these are families, with overwhelming a one-parent family (and) usually a single mom with two or three young children."

But Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) said the state needs real welfare reforms to meet the federal work requirements and to get more people to self-sufficiency.

And Rep. Fulton Sheen (R-Plainwell), who sponsored the lifetime limit changes, said, "Benefits were not meant to go on and on."

The nearly dozen amendments successfully pushed by Republicans during floor debate on HB 4309 included a requirement, passed 65-35, that people under the work requirement sanction be working for the last 30 days of their penalty before their benefits would be reinstated, unless they were already exempt from that provision.

Parents could also be denied Family Independence Program assistance for a number of other reasons under other amendments that were adopted. Benefits would be denied to:

- Persons with drug felony convictions on or after January 1, 1997 (adopted 86-16);
- Persons with violent felony convictions for such crimes as murder, rape, robbery and child molestation (adopted 88-15);
- Fugitives from justice or who are in violation of their probation (83-19);
- Non- U.S. citizens (adopted 85-18).

The House also voted 75-28 to create a pilot program to test people under the assistance program who are suspected of substance abuse.

As the amendments went through, Mr. Kolb said, "This bill started off bad and it's going downhill fast."

And Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) argued that the courts have already struck down a drug-testing requirement and it was not rational to implement another provision like that again.

But Mr. Kooiman, noting courts found a mandatory drug statewide testing program to be unconstitutional, said the drug testing amendment only calls for testing of people who are suspected, not everyone, and that it's not a statewide program.

Rep. Virgil Smith (D-Detroit) also argued that people who are on the lam from the law would not be receiving welfare anyway. But Rep. Scott Hummel (R-DeWitt) said there was a fugitive from Georgia in his district who in fact was receiving assistance from Michigan.

The first and second sanctions against recipients would mean nine-month penalties a piece, with the third sanction being for 24 months. That provision was approved on 56-47 votes, with several lawmakers voting against the majority of members in their caucus. Republicans who voted against the amendment were: Rep Bill Caul (R-Mt. Pleasant), Rep. Goeff Hansen (R-Hart), Rep. Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw Township), Rep. David Law (R-Commerce Township), Rep. Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek), Rep. Tom Pearce (R-Rockford), Rep. John Proos (R-St. Joseph), Rep. Barb Vander Veen (R-Allendale) and Rep. Bill Van Regenmorter (R-Jenison).

And Democrats who voted for the amendment were Rep. Kathy Angerer (D-Dundee), Rep. Pam Byrnes (D-Chelsea), Rep. Ed Clemente (D-Lincoln Park), Rep. Andy Dillon (D-Redford), Rep. John Espinoza (D-Croswell), Rep. Kathleen Law (D-Gibraltar), Rep. Gary McDowell (D-Rudyard), Rep. Gino Polidori (D-Dearborn), Rep. Joel Sheltrown (D-West Branch) and Rep. Dudley Spade (D-Tipton).

Four lawmakers were absent for that vote: Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-Zeeland), Rep. LaMar Lemmons Jr. (D-Detroit), Rep. John Stewart (R-Plymouth) and Rep. Carl Williams (D-Saginaw).

A Senate appropriations subcommittee reported out its budget bill for the Department of Human Services on Thursday as well, which includes a 90 day-90 day-24 months sanction policy, but does not have the lifetime limit provision. And Mr. Kooiman said the House version is only part of the process of completing welfare reforms.

48-Month Limit Removed From DHS Budget

MIRS – Thursday, May 19, 2006

The Senate decided not to include a 48-month lifetime limit for welfare recipients in its Department of Human Services (DHS) budget, which the Senate DHS Appropriations Subcommittee unanimously moved to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

This is sure to cause friction in the House as the House DHS budget included the 48-month limit under the auspices that it would help the state comply with federal welfare requirements in time to prevent the state from being fined by the federal government.

The state has until Oct. 1, 2006 to come up with welfare reforms that coincide with federal guidelines.

Committee Chair Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood) said he doesn't think the limit should be included in the budget because it's not a budgetary item. The 48-month lifetime limits should be addressed in a separate bill, Hardiman said.

House Republicans disagree with Hardiman. The House included the 48-month limit in its bill because it's concerned that if it's not addressed in the budget, it would not be addressed in time to save the state from incurring federal fines (See "House, Senate Differ On Welfare Approach," 5/8/06).

Senate leadership continues to support the 48-month limit, but no decision has been made as to whether it should be included in the DHS budget or in separate bills, said Ari **ADLER**, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken **SIKKEMA** (R-Wyoming).

When asked if leadership was concerned about getting fined if the 48-month limit ends up being excluded from the DHS bill, Adler said, "We would need to have more information on that before we know for sure. That's not a concern that's been raised here yet."

Hardiman and the DHS are both encouraged by the administration's new Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program, which they say will be effective at permanently getting people off welfare by training and education advocacy.

Hardiman mentioned pilot JET programs would be expanding and said the department told him that the program would bring the state in line with federal guidelines.

"I'm holding the department to that," Hardiman said.

Asked if this budget would go to conference committee, as is common with budget bills, Hardiman responded, "Oh, yes."

"We'll go into negotiations and hear each other's perspective and see what comes out, but we're happy with what we have and I'm sure he (Rep. Jerry **KOOIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids), the House's lead on the welfare issue) is happy with what he has," Hardiman said.

The Senate version of the DHS budget also includes funding for 56 new Child Protective Service (CPS) workers, which is five more than the governor recommended. CPS workers

oversee child abuse cases.

The Senate also requested $1.38 million to hire 20 new investigators to inspect and respond to complaints about day care centers. This was not asked for in the other two budget proposals.

The Senate's overall funding recommendation is $4.471 billion, which is $31,600 more than the governor's recommendation. Of that money, the Senate is recommending $1.187 billion be funded with General Fund (GF) money, which is $3.2 million less than the governor's recommendation.

House passes plan to restrict access to welfare benefits

May 18, 2006

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — People convicted of certain crimes — including murder, rape and some drug offenses — would not be able to receive welfare benefits under a bill passed Thursday by the state House.

The House plan also would restrict the amount of time able-bodied people could get welfare benefits to two consecutive years and a lifetime limit of four years. People would have to show proof they are legally living in the U.S. to get benefits.

Recipients would lose some of their benefits if they don't fulfill work or training requirements. In a pilot program, welfare applicants could be drug tested if there are indications of substance abuse.

Backers of the plan also said it provides more support, education and job training to help welfare recipients become self-sufficient.

"Then it provides the tough stuff — increased sanctions, which every other state that has been successful in welfare reform has done," said Rep. Jerry Kooiman, a Grand Rapids Republican. "This is an urgent matter. We can't wait any longer to begin welfare reform in the state of Michigan."

Kooiman said Michigan is the only state in the region that does not have lifetime limits for welfare assistant.

Opponents said the bill will hurt children most by throwing their parents off the welfare recipient list.

"This bill started off bad and is going downhill fast," Rep. Chris Kolb, a Democrat from Ann Arbor, said as the bill was amended several times to push stricter changes in the system. Amendments addressed the welfare eligibility of parole violators, fugitives from justice and others.

The bill passed by a 64-39 vote, mostly along party lines. Eight Democrats joined 56 Republicans in favor, with 39 Democrats opposed. Four lawmakers did not vote.

The legislation is a supplemental appropriations bill that would provide a structure for the welfare changes to take place. The bill goes to the Senate for its consideration.

House Passes Stricter Welfare Reforms

MIRS, Thursday, May 19, 2006

Today, 10 House Democrats joined with 55 Republicans in passing HB 4309, legislation that includes tougher welfare requirements. However, most Capitol observers believe the bill is likely to undergo many changes before it reaches Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**'s desk.

Three Republicans simply missed the vote. None voted against the bill.

"We consider this bill to be a work in progress," Granholm Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** told MIRS. "We believe Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood) is committed to working with us on the issues involved. We believe there will be a lot more work done on it as it goes through the process."

Rep. Chris **KOLB** (D-Ann Arbor), the House Democrats' point person on the bill, said he didn't even think it was worth speculating on whether Granholm would veto the bill because he didn't believe it would reach her desk in its present form.

"As the bill now stands I believe it's a one-chamber bill," Kolb said, in reply to a question as to whether the Governor would veto it. "I think the Senate is on our side on some of these things."

The House Republicans passed nine floor amendments to the bill that made the legislation, which many Democrats had already considered to be too restrictive, even tougher.

MIRS asked House Speaker Pro Tem Jerry **KOOIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids), the House Republicans' point person on HB 4309, if House leadership had bulked up the requirements in the bill in order to create bargaining chips for negations with the Senate and the administration.

"No, I think this bill reflects where our caucus is on the issue," Kooiman responded. "I think this (House-passed bill) would put Michigan pretty much in the middle of the road, as far as sanctions and (eligibility) limits. I think it puts us in line with the states that have been successful with their welfare programs."

MIRS asked Kooiman if he's more concerned about negotiating with the Senate or the administration.

"I think the Senate will be with us on most of these issues," Kooiman said. "They were in December. I think the legislation we had then was pretty good."

But Granholm didn't think those welfare reforms were good, so she vetoed the measure and now the GOP-controlled Legislature is back, taking another crack at it. Whether or not getting tougher on welfare is a political winner remains to be seen, however, the fact that about 20 percent of the Democratic caucus saw fit to vote for the bill could be interpreted as some sort of statement.

Among the amendments passed on the House floor today were:

- To prohibit murders, rapists, other violent criminals and fugitives from justice from receiving state welfare checks,

- Require those who have sanctioned for not meeting federal work requirements to work at least 30 days before the sanctions are lifted,

- Include a 24-month suspension from state payments for violating work requirements three times,

- Create a pilot program for drug testing those who receive welfare if they are suspected of illegal drug use; and,

- Require recipients to show proof of U.S. citizenship before receiving state welfare payments and demand that proper authorities be contacted if it is found that a person is in the United States illegally.

On the drug-testing amendment, Rep. Aldo **[VAGNOOZI]** (D-Farmington Hills) said the measure sounded like déjà vu all over again.

"I believe we tried this before and it was ruled unconstitutional," Vagnozzi said. "Why would we do this again and take on all the extra cost of having to go back to court?"

But Kooiman argued that the courts had ruled against a Michigan law requiring general drug testing of welfare recipients. Today's amendment was limited to certain recipients suspected of substance abuse.

An amendment offered by Rep. Fulton **SHEEN** (R-Plainwell) would have set the lifetime cap for receiving welfare in Michigan at 36 months.

"These programs were never intended to go on and on," Sheen argued.

The Sheen amendment was defeated on a 46-57 vote, which showed clearly that House Republicans were sticking with the caucus position that the cap should be 48 months. Currently, Michigan has no cap.

House Republicans argue that by adding sanctions and limits, along with education and training programs, the legislation will help those who need it most.

"With these reform efforts, we're preparing welfare recipients for the future and proving to residents that their tax dollars are being used effectively," said House Appropriations Committee Chair Scott **HUMMEL** (R-DeWitt), the sponsor of the bill. "The welfare reforms place an emphasis on education and job training, and limit welfare assistance to 48 months for able-bodied recipients, including a maximum of 24 consecutive months of assistance."

But Kolb said the legislation, if it were ever enacted, which he doubted, would hurt the most vulnerable persons in Michigan, the children.

"They say able-bodied adults, but the truth is that this mostly affects families," Kolb said. "It could penalize families just because someone who is supposed to work 30 hours a week, gets only 29 and a half hours."

The 10 Democrats who voted for the bill included House Minority Leader Dianne **BYRUM** (D-Onondaga) and Reps. Glenn **ANDERSON** (D-Westland), Kathy **ANGERER** (D-Dundee), Pam

BYRNES (D-Chelsea), Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.), John **ESPINOZA** (D-Croswell), Gary **McDOWELL** (D-Rudyard), Michael **SAK** (D-Grand Rapids), Dale **SHELTROWN** (D-West Branch), and Dudley **SPADE** (D-Tipton).

Those missing the vote today were Reps. Leon **DROLET** (R-Clinton Twp.), Bill **HUIZENGA** (R-Zeeland), Kathleen **LAW** (D-Gibraltar), Lamar **LEMMONS**, Jr. (D-Detroit), Jim **PLAKAS** (D-Garden City), John **STEWART** (R-Plymouth) and Steve **TOBOCMAN** (D-Detroit).

It should be noted that some committees were being held simultaneously while HB 4309 was being debated and voted on.

Michigan Report

May 18, 2006

BILLS APPROVED ON CHILD METH EXPOSURE

Exposure of children to the production and use of methamphetamine could be considered child abuse under legislation that won unanimous approval in the Senate Thursday.

Approved were HB 5843, HB 5844 and HB 5930 that require the state be notified if a child is discovered in a place where methamphetamine is produced.

Just as current law requires that law enforcement agencies be contacted if there is evidence of sexual abuse, the bills would require that the Department of Human Services as well as local prosecutors.

Under HB 5843, physicians, teachers, clergy, psychologists and others would report to the DHS if they think a child may have been exposed to methamphetamine.

The bill also requires the DHS to maintain a central registry to keep all records of those reports received regarding children exposed to methamphetamine.

Cocaine in

Friday, May 19, 2006

By ERIC ENGLISH
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

WEST BRANCH - A 23-year-old West Branch woman faces an involuntary manslaughter charge after prosecutors say her 5-month-old baby died from drinking breast milk contaminated with cocaine.

Sara Shelby appeared Thursday in Ogemaw County District Court for arraignment on the manslaughter charge and could receive up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

The West Branch woman remains free on bond pending a preliminary examination set for July 25.

"We've set the examination a little farther out than normal for the defense to have its experts review our findings," said Scott M. Williams, Ogemaw County's assistant prosecutor.

A medical expert for the prosecution has concluded that the baby died from ingesting cocaine. Prosecutors allege that Shelby used cocaine during the time she was breast-feeding and the drug was passed on through her breast milk.

Williams previously said he did not charge Shelby with murder since he believed there was no intent on her part to kill her daughter.

Shelby did not enter a plea on Thursday, Williams said.

She also faces an abuse and neglect charge in Ogemaw County Probate Court involving a 2-year-old child. The charge stems from the investigation into the death of the 5-month-old, Williams said.

The 2-year-old has been placed in the custody of relatives and the parents are only allowed supervised visits, he said.

A jury trial in the abuse and neglect case is set for July 11. Williams said there are no drug-related charges arising from the case at this time.

Shelby's case dates to Aug. 21, 2005, when a woman called 911 in Ogemaw County and reported that her baby wasn't breathing. An ambulance came to the house and took the infant to West Branch Regional Medical Center, where she was subsequently pronounced dead.

The initial cause of death was believed to be sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS.

But routine laboratory analysis performed months later detected the presence of cocaine in the young child's system.

The Times was unable to reach Shelby or her defense attorney, William Engemann of West Branch, for comment.

Man Living Under Minor's Bed Faces Charges

Girl In Foster Care

POSTED: 5:49 pm EDT May 18, 2006

A St. Clair Shores man who had a secret sexual relationship with his 13-year-old neighbor has pleaded guilty.
Wayne David Koch, 37, was found by police hiding under the girl's bed in March with a loaded gun, according to police.
Police said Koch had been living in the girl's bedroom for months, trying to conceal their sexual relationship from the girl's father. Koch, who at one time lived in the girl's garage, moved into the home and would live either under the bed or in the closet.
The relationship between Koch and the girl began with movies and dinner, and then escalated to sex. The relationship ended last month when Koch told police he pulled a loaded gun on the girl when she threatened to end the relationship.
Koch entered a plea of guilty on criminal sexual conduct and four weapons charges.
He is being held on a $500,000 bond.
The girl is in foster care.

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NEWS: Local/Regional

Trooper talks about Internet safety

By BETHANY ROOT Petoskey News-Review Staff writer

Thursday, May 18, 2006 2:24 PM EDT

Child pornography, abductions and sexual solicitations: With all the Internet-related crimes showing up in recent regional and national headlines, it's enough to make parents paranoid. And according to Jay Poupard, a member of the Michigan State Police Computer Crimes Task Force, they have a good reason to be.

"Nothing's private," Poupard told the parents gathered in the Petoskey Middle School auditorium Tuesday.

"The community has to realize, parents have to realize that it is an issue," he added. "It's not something we should take lightly. It's as big of a problem as a child being exposed to narcotics."

Poupard has been a part of the computer crimes unit for six years, and said that they receive about 50 tips each day.

During the Internet safety talk, organized by the Public Schools of Petoskey and Charlevoix-Emmet Human Services, Poupard shared his experiences with working on the task force. He also showed parents just how easy it is to find personal information like full names, phone numbers and even directions to a person's home using chat rooms, messageboards and search engines.

"During the time we were in school, we didn't have word processors, we had to use typewriters," said Petoskey superintendent John Scholten, who introduced Poupard. "But with technology comes dangers, too."

According to Poupard's presentation, about one in five children aged 10-17 have received a sexual solicitation or approach. One in 33 have received an aggressive sex solicitation, meaning the predator asked the child to meet them, called or sent them mail or gifts.

Earlier in the day, Poupard talked with approximately 1,000 Petoskey students, ranging from seventh- to 10th-grade, the major age group victimized online.

"There were good questions asked," Poupard said. "They were paying attention."

During his presentation, Poupard spoke of numerous cases in which children were inappropriately solicited with photos or sexually charged conversation over the Internet.

Poupard and his colleagues regularly pose as children and teens online to catch Internet predators. He said the record for the amount of time it has taken to meet such a predator online, arrange for a meeting in person, and arrest the man was 27 minutes.

"He brought a camera, sex toys and had created a bedroom in the back of his van," Poupard said.

Survey the MySpace.com pages of area high school students, and you'll not only see personal information listing teens' birthdays, family names, and even bedtimes, but also photos of minors drinking alcohol and messages laced with profanity.

While MySpace users have the option of making their profiles private, most teens don't, and even the private profiles list some personal information like name, age and location.

Such profiles don't just make it easier for sexual predators to prey on teens. They could have a lifelong impact on their ability to get into college and get a job, Poupard said. Increasingly, employers and admissions officers are using MySpace and other sites to do background checks, and Poupard emphasizes that once a photo or comment has been on MySpace, it's out there for good, even if you delete it later.

Kathy-Jo Wargin, a member of the Petoskey school board , said that this is another reason parents should be concerned.

"It is happening and once that material is out there, whether these students are truly representing what they're doing or just trying to create an exaggerated profile, it's out there and colleges and employers are looking at it," Wargin said.

"Another thing that parents really need to know is, even if their child isn't posting information on Internet, it is very possible that fellow students or friends could be snapping picture of their child and posting them with improper comments," she added.

Wargin is a mother, too, and although her preteen son has yet to express interest in the Internet, she said that if he does, their family is going to have strict rules.

"All parents need to take a look at what's out there and figure out what kind of boundaries they are going to set in their home," Wargin said. "It's here and we need to deal with it."

Poupard emphasized to the students and the parents that for children, Internet usage is not a right, it's a privilege. So children and teens need to earn their parents' trust in order to get online, just as they would have to earn the opportunity to drive a car.

Throughout the discussion, Poupard offered these tips to parents hoping to monitor the activity of their kids:

1) Control access.

Know your children's' passwords, or better yet, create them yourself. That way, your child or teenager can't access their e-mail, instant messenger, or the Internet without asking you first.

"You have to be overly involved," Poupard said.

Poupard also recommended forbidding kids from talking with anyone online that they don't know. That's because 97 percent of online offenders are people children don't know prior to chatting with them online.

Also discuss with your children what sites they can visit, who they can talk to, for how long and where they can use the Internet.

2) Know where they're using the Internet.

Poupard recommends putting the computer in a common room like the living room, instead of a bedroom. That way, it's easier to keep an eye on what your child is doing online.

Also, find out what the Internet rules are when they go to a friend or family member's house. If kids are given free rein, think twice about letting your child spend time there.

3) Keep communication open.

While you can keep track of the content of your child's chatting by using chat logs or keystroke capture devices, Poupard said that the best technique is making sure you can communicate with your child.

And if you see your child minimizing a screen when you walk in the room or another telltale sign that they're hiding something from you, ask them about it.

"Encourage them to confide in you," he said. "You have to get to know your child. Parents have to talk to their child about it and say they want to know why their child did that."

It's important to let your child know that while there may be some necessary repercussions for their actions, they can tell you about any suspicious activity or people they encounter online.

4) Be informed.

Curious about MySpace and what members can do? Sign up for it. Wondering what 'pos' means in chat lingo? Look it up using a search engine (it's an acronym for "parent over shoulder," by the way).

Also, find the blocking, filtering and rating applications on your computer, and learn

when to use them.

For dial-up Internet customers, a password is needed to connect. But for cable Internet customers, anyone can get online at any time. For these cases, Poupard said there are free personal firewalls like zone alarm and tiny firewall that you can use to keep the machine off the Internet.

Internet safety

www.netsmartz.org

www.isafe.com

24-hour CyberTipLine: 1-877-5CYBER3 (1-877-529-2373)

Bethany Root can be reached at 439-9397, or broot@petoskeynews.com.

FROM OUR READERS: Put health care above politics

May 19, 2006

Gov. Jennifer Granholm offers to expand a program to increase the number of uninsured Michigan residents who would be eligible to participate in a state-sponsored health insurance program ("Granholm to boost state health plan," May 12), and the immediate knee-jerk reaction of Matt Resch, spokesman for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, was, "It appeared Granholm was reaching for an election-year advantage."
Apparently neither he nor DeRoche had read the plan, but since it was proposed by the Democratic Granholm, it had to be a ploy to help her get re-elected, and the plan itself probably had no merit.
This sort of partisan disdain for the other party's ideas will keep Michigan and the United States from keeping up with the growing Middle Eastern and Asian economies, which are already wreaking havoc on our economic and social way of life.
Our elected officials should carefully digest every idea put forth, debate the merits and shortfalls as a civilized government body, and eliminate these knee-jerk partisan remarks. These partisan snipes are starting to sound a bit childish.

Tony Amadori
Livonia

Coverage for all Michiganders
I like Gov. Granholm's proposed health care plan because it will provide health care to every citizen of Michigan. Some people, like senior citizens, need health care and can't afford it because of the high costs.
But I don't think the governor needs $600 million from the federal government to make this plan work. The state already has $400 million.
Yes, the state would have to get the approval of the federal government to use the money for the new health plan, but the state doesn't need the extra money. And I don't see how this plan can help the automotive industry. The people in Canada are making more cars, but there was probably some incentive other than affordable health care.
Republican fears are right: It would cost the state more because the state would have to pay back the money, and that would cause health care costs to go up again.
I think her plan should be aimed at people who have low-paying jobs and senior citizens who are retired.
As Granholm said, this plan is supposed to cover every citizen in Michigan and if it doesn't, I believe it's an election-year ploy designed to get more votes for re-election.

Laura Hughes
Rochester Hills

Published May 19, 2006
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Dr. Josef Kolling: Michigan needs to make dental access a priority

Oral health care for all Michigan residents is vital to a healthy and productive Michigan. Research now tells us oral health and general health are more closely related than many once thought, which means good oral health leads to good overall health.

Oral health care must now be considered primary care. Viewing them as separate no longer makes sense.

Unfortunately, access to oral health care has become a two-tiered system for Michigan's population. Citizens with dental insurance, or the ability to pay for care, enjoy access. Citizens suffering the most from oral disease are the uninsured and individuals covered by Medicaid. These residents are also the ones who experience difficulty obtaining oral health care.

In Michigan, about 45 percent of the population lack dental insurance, with uninsured children 2.5 times less likely to receive dental care than insured children.

The Michigan Dental Association is grateful for the reinstatement of the state's adult dental Medicaid program and recent 22-county expansion of the children's Healthy Kids Dental program for Medicaid-eligible children.

However, when comparing the differences between the adult Medicaid program and Healthy Kids Dental, a significant disparity between both the scope of services provided, as well as the provider reimbursement rates, becomes evident.

Since the Healthy Kids Dental program's launch in 2001, more children receive regular oral health

care by more dentists without traveling a great distance.

Today, children in 59 Michigan counties are fortunate to receive regular, preventive oral health care. The American Dental Association views Healthy Kids Dental as a national model for Medicaid dental reform.

We at the Michigan Dental Association applaud the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Legislature for its wisdom and foresight in establishing the program.

But more can be accomplished.

Even with the strides being made in oral health care access, Michigan Dental Association members regularly donate many hours of care to low-income and underserved populations. According to the American Dental Association, dentists throughout the country provide more than $1.7 billion every year in free or discounted care to people who otherwise couldn't afford it. But charity is not a health care system. And the people of Michigan should not have to depend on charity for basic dental care.

As the Michigan Dental Association celebrates its 150th anniversary, making it the oldest state dental society in the country and the first professional association in Michigan, we continue our mission to serve the public. At the same time, we must continue to look for progressive way to meet the oral health care needs of all Michigan residents.

When Michigan's financial house is stable, we urge the Legislature to adopt a program similar to Healthy Kids Dental for all Michigan Medicaid recipients. Michigan will be a healthier, more productive state when this happens.

Lured by series, volunteers call

Friday, May 19, 2006

JEREMIAH STETTLER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Linda Lane has a little less footwork to do in finding recruits for a fledgling mentoring initiative for foster children.

The coordinator of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative in Saginaw County said her list of potential mentors has doubled in the days since The Saginaw News published a series on the travails of foster children transitioning out of state care.

The list has grown to 15 mentors from seven since early May, broadening the ranks of volunteers who may help troubled teens stay on the right path into adulthood.

These youths need to have someone to talk to; someone to keep them on track and to guide them in the right direction," Lane said.

Mary Ross, a Saginaw mother of three and grandmother of seven, volunteered after reading accounts of foster children gaining independence with little or no family support.

"Even though they are young adults, they still need guidance," she said.

This year, about 50 foster children out of 530 in Saginaw County will "age out" of the system, growing too old for state care.

The Jim Casey organization, which uses private funds to provide allowances for the foster children and teach them how to live independently, hopes to ease that transition with community mentors. The volunteers guide foster kids as they try to find a job, pay bills and survive the adult world.

Mentors also provide foster children with a friend or confidante as they try to make it on their own.

Casey, founder of United Parcel Service, formed the Seattle-based charity in 1966 to aid those in the child welfare system.

Ross believes volunteering can make a difference, even though hardship, rejection and instability have shaped so many of the young people's lives.

"I don't think anyone is so hard core that something can't change in their lives," she said. "It just takes the right amount of patience, guidance and just being there for them."

Lane said she will meet with volunteers in early June.

Randy Barst, director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Services, said interest in the plight of foster children has risen noticeably since The News' series. Now he hopes talk will turn to action.

"It has drawn a huge amount of attention to a very serious situation," he said.

"I hope it translates into an increase in people interested in becoming mentors and people interested in becoming community representatives for people in these situations." v

Jeremiah Stettler is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9685.

"I am guilty... I loved him to death."

Trace Christenson
The Battle Creek Enquirer

As her bloodied boyfriend lay dying on the kitchen floor, Lisa Dunmire told a 911 dispatcher she had been attacked.

"My boyfriend came at me and attacked me," Dunmire cried into the phone, according to the 911 recording played Thursday during her trial in Calhoun County Circuit Court. "And I had a knife in my hand, and I stabbed him."

It was just before 1 a.m. on Sept. 17, and Dunmire called for help after she stabbed Matthew Morales once in the chest in her home at the Triangle Mobile Home Park in Emmett Township.

"Oh, my God, he has stopped breathing," she screamed during the recording. "Oh my God, Matthew."

The dispatcher attempted to calm Dunmire and gave her instructions for CPR, telling her to blow air into his mouth.

Dunmire told the dispatcher it worked, that Morales was breathing and the dispatcher said the police and paramedics were on the way.

"He's not breathing," she cried out. "Oh, my God, Matthew, where are they? Oh, baby, come on Come on baby, breathe."

Emmett Township Public Safety Officer Clark Lawson and two medics, including Steve Corwin of LifeCare Ambulance, were unable to save Morales, 35, who died on the kitchen floor.

Dunmire, 39, was arrested and is being tried this week on a charge of second-degree murder. She listened to the 911 recording Thursday in court.

Testimony continues today before Judge Conrad Sindt.

In a video of an interview begun about two hours after Morales died, Dunmire told Detective Brady Keys she stabbed her boyfriend during a fight.

"I said 'If you don't get away, I am going to stab you,'" Dunmire remembered saying.

"'If you put your hands on me I will fight back,'" Dunmire said. "If he wouldn't have put his hands on me, I wouldn't have done what I did."

She told Keys she had been abused by Morales at least 40 times during their three-year relationship but that she loved Morales.

"I know I am at fault," she told Keys. "You guys can't do anything to me. God will judge me. He was alive and guess what, I am guilty. I loved him to death."

After court, Morales' mother, Dora Morales, disputed Dunmire's suggestion of abuse by her son.

"I don't think she was ever abused by Matt," Dora Morales said. "Instead, she was doing it to him."

Several witnesses testified about statements Dunmire made immediately after the stabbing:

- "I did it. There is no one else here," Lawson said Dunmire told him.
- Corwin said Dunmire told him the stabbing was an accident. "She said it was an accident and she did not mean to do it, and she was talking to someone when it happened."
- Emmett officer Shane Schwarz sat with Dunmire in a patrol car for 20 minutes. "She said she didn't mean to hurt him, that she just wanted him to stop hitting her. She did not mean to hurt Matthew, she just wanted him to stop."

Dunmire told Schwarz that Morales "was getting in her face and calling her a dumb bitch and he wouldn't stop. If he had just stopped, she wouldn't have done anything. 'I know I shouldn't have done it but he just kept coming at me.'"

Later Dunmire asked the officer if Morales would be all right. "If he didn't press charges, would she be arrested?" she asked, adding, "If she had just let Matthew hit her, the bruises would go away and none of this would have happened."

- "He was beating the s— out of me, and I stabbed him," Dunmire said to Emmett officer Liza Farrell.

Police officers testified they did not see any fresh injuries on Dunmire.

Another witness, Detective Sgt. Scott Hrcka from the Michigan State Police crime lab, testified he found a kitchen knife with an 8-inch blade on the counter but did not find any fingerprints on it.

He also said he found Morales still holding a cigarette between the index and middle finger of his right hand.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Originally published May 19, 2006

WAYNE COUNTY

Wayne Co. gives school failing grade

Agency may not renew its juvenile detention academy's charter June 30

May 19, 2006

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The charter school that serves children at Wayne County's Juvenile Detention Facility is looking for a new authorizer in anticipation that its current sponsor will cut ties with the academy over financial, academic and governance concerns.

Officials at the Benjamin Carson Academy took several actions earlier this year to satisfy the issues raised by its charter authorizer, the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, including forcing out its management company, which had come under scrutiny for excessive charges.

But those moves have failed to placate RESA officials, who say they have not seen sufficient changes to justify extending the school's charter, which expires June 30.

The academy educates the 3,000 to 4,000 children who go through the juvenile facility each year, or about 175 on any given day. Carson runs its own operations within the juvenile detention facility, which is managed by the county.

Blandina Rose, RESA's public school academies manager, said the last chance for the agency to reconsider its decision is at its board's June 14 meeting. But at this point, it is unconvinced that the school has righted itself.

Rose said RESA needs to see evidence that the school can maintain a balanced budget.

The Wayne County Commission on Thursday approved $425,000 to help the school finish its academic year -- money the county said was necessary because of state reductions in funds for juvenile detention schools. But, paradoxically, the county can't approve funds to assist the school for the next academic year until a charter is in place.

Rose said the school's curriculum fails to meet the special needs of the population that resides in a juvenile detention facility.

"If your program just looks like a regular school, how does that help those kids?" she asked.

But Sue Hamilton-Smith, the interim director of the Department of Children and Family Services, said she was startled at RESA's continued decision not to extend the academy's charter.

The academy's board has new members who have worked hard to turn around its operations, Hamilton-Smith said.
"I don't think they gave them a fair chance," she said.
Hamilton-Smith said the county and academy see a number of "strong possibilities" to replace RESA as the charter authority but declined to name potential candidates.
A message left for Madeline Flowers, the academy board's chairwoman, was not returned.

Contact ZACHARY GORCHOW at 313-223-4536 or zgorchow@freepress.com.

Friday, May 19, 2006

Juvenile academy in limbo

Amy Lee, The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Wayne County is scrambling to find a way to educate children held at its juvenile detention center because its charter school will be dissolved at the end of June.

Concerns about financial oversight at the Benjamin Carson Academy, the school inside the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility on St. Antoine, prompted the Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency to pull the school's charter. Michigan requires that charter schools have backing from an educational institution, such as a university or intermediate school district, to operate.

Without a backer, the academy's future is in limbo. The charter issue comes just four months after a private company that ran the school pulled out because it said it wasn't making enough money.

State law requires counties to educate juveniles incarcerated more than five days. It's unclear what the county would do to educate the children if its fails to land a charter sponsor.

"Carson Academy is going to be authorized. We will do whatever we have to do to educate those kids," said Sue Hamilton-Smith, interim director of the county's department of children and family services.

The 194-bed facility on St. Antoine houses and educates about 3,500 troubled kids each year -- or about 175 daily -- and operates on a $3.4 million budget. State cuts in school funding, coupled with a contentious relationship with Innovative Educational Programs, the private company hired to teach the kids, prompted that company to pull out of the 5th-12th grade school in January.

Officials became increasingly concerned about operations at Carson when Innovative cut back school days last year to 180 from 200 to save money.

"We kept trying to get information from the management company about how they were spending the money and they wouldn't give it to us … so we're terminating the charter," said Marlene Davis, superintendent of the Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency.

Woman testifies at rape suspect's hearing

Muskegon Chronicle

Friday, May 19, 2006

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Ottawa County 58th District Judge Susan Jonas on Wednesday ordered Kevin Allen Spencer, 20, to stand trial on sexual assault charges after hearing a 83-year-old Holland woman's testimony on what prosecutors described as a brutal rape.

Spencer allegedly admitted the rape to detectives after his arrest on a Silent Observer tip.

The victim, who was sleeping in her West 31st Street house April 27, said she awoke to find a man wearing a hooded sweatshirt standing over her. She told him to leave, but he refused.

She testified he then raped her, hitting her in the mouth, bruising her lip and leaving marks on her cheeks where he held her down. She said she might have been choked but was not sure where he placed his hands.

Friends Of Florence Unger Testify In Court

They Said Husband Couldn't Deal With Divorce

ClickOnDetroit

POSTED: 6:12 pm EDT May 18, 2006

Two friends of Florence Unger testified Thursday in the trial of her husband, who's accused of killing her.
They said the suburban Detroit woman told them Mark Unger was having trouble dealing with their pending divorce in the week before her death.
Mark Unger is charged with first-degree murder in the October 2003 death of his 37-year-old wife at a resort in rural Benzie County. The 45-year-old Huntington Woods man has pleaded not guilty.
Investigators said they believe Florence Unger either fell or was pushed from a 12-foot-high deck -- and that Mark Unger moved her body into the shallow edge of a lake, where she drowned.

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MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
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News Release

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Dickinson-Iron County collaborative receives $90,000 Great Start Collaborative grant

Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood development and care

May 19, 2006

KINGSFORD – Today the superintendent of the Dickinson-Iron ISD joined board members of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and local legislators to celebrate a $90,000 grant to support a local Great Start Collaborative that will strengthen early childhood development and care in Dickinson and Iron counties.

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and ECIC chief operating officer Mike Foley presented a ceremonial check to Johanna Ostwald, Dickinson-Iron ISD Superintendent.

From the day she took office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has maintained that early childhood development and care is a critical investment in the economic viability of the state.

"Children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life," Granholm said. "High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy."

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which the Governor announced in her 2005 State of the State address, is developing the framework for effective early childhood development and care programs through partnerships with local collaboratives around the state. The local Great Start Collaboratives will use the grant money from the ECIC to conduct a community assessment and develop a strategic plan for the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports, accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten and their families.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," said Mike Foley. "The board was able to award this first round of grants with the resources currently available, and is committed to funding Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state as new funding sources are identified."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to Dickinson-Iron ISD, 13 other ISDs and RESAs around the state were also awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

-MORE-

"Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

For more information about the ECIC and Great Start collaboratives, visit the Project Great Start Web site at www.michigan.gov/greatstart

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