Department of Human Services

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Wednesday, June 28, 2006

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Important story at this spot

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STATES BRACE FOR NEW WELFARE WORK REGULATIONS

Kevin Freking / Associated Press
June 28, 2006- Detroit News

WASHINGTON -- No more bed rest, going on errands for a friend or reading the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" to fulfill work requirements for welfare.

The Bush administration will issue new regulations today that clarify what states can count when it comes to work participation under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.

Under the law, states are supposed to have at least half of their welfare recipients in approved work activities or face cuts in funding of up to 5 percent. However, states have been on their own in defining those work activities.

Some have gone too far, the administration says.

Congress recently instructed the Department of Health and Human Services to draft regulations that would explicitly define the 12 work categories cited in federal law.

The Government Accountability Office said last year that there were too many differences in how some of the states defined work.

For instance, of 10 states reviewed, five said caring for a disabled family member would meet work participation requirements. Five did not. Six states counted substance abuse treatment as work, but four did not.

But some social services analysts worry that the new approach could stifle innovative programs undertaken by the states. They say such approaches have helped reduce the welfare rolls by 57 percent over the past decade.

State at risk in welfare reform

Welfare-to-work program has to be tied to reality

Jackson Citizen Patriot
Tuesday, June 27, 2006

We remember the doom-and-gloom warnings in the early 1990s as Congress looked seriously at welfare reform. When the reforms were enacted, the worst-case scenarios never materialized. So we aren't joining a panic brigade over the latest wave of welfare reforms. Even so, it is important to spell out the risk of the reforms, for the welfare of children is at stake.

One key federal reform was the adoption of welfare-to-work standards. Michigan succeeded in reducing its welfare rolls significantly by getting people connected with jobs. However, under a new formula that takes effect on Oct. 1, the federal government expects the states to have 50 percent of welfare recipients in eligible work activities. These include paid work, subsidized work, on-the-job training, community service and vocational training.

Problem: Despite Michigan's progress over the years, the state currently has only about 23 percent of welfare participants working. It is one of 15 states that would have to increase work participation by more than 100 percent.

If Michigan fails to attain the 50 percent level of work participation, it will be penalized with cuts in federal funding - as much as $38 million.

Michigan has nothing to fear from this reform - if it can reach the 50 percent work-participation rate. Frankly, that goal is probably unattainable, at least until Michigan's economy turns around. It isn't even just the reality that Michigan's economic recovery lags behind the rest of the nation's, or that hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been lost, or that the unemployment rate is at 6 percent - about two points above the national rate.

Rather, the impediments to welfare recipients finding work often have to do with transportation and child care. There's the expense of maintaining and operating a car these days with fuel running about $3 per gallon.

But it is child care that grabs us. How can single parents or married couples on welfare hold jobs if they have no reliable or affordable child care? According to the state Department of Human Services, federal-state funding for child-care programs last year served 264,146 children at a cost of $478.5 million.

Although the 2007 budget is not yet finalized, projected spending is $10 million less. Oddly, the reason less spending is projected is that people who can't find work don't need child care, so the state is planning for less even as it is being expected to get more people on welfare employed.

We have long felt that the welfare-to-work shift is a good one - as long as it is tied to reality. It does no good for the federal government to squeeze a state like Michigan in the middle of an economic downturn in order to get more people working. If there were jobs, if there were child care, if there were transportation - it would make sense.

WELFARE RULES TO LET STATES KNOW WHAT COUNTS AS WORK

BY KEVIN FREKING
ASSOCIATED PRESS
June 28, 2006

WASHINGTON -- The Bush administration will issue new regulations today that clarify what states can count to fulfill work requirements for welfare.

Under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, states are supposed to have at least half of their welfare recipients in approved work activities or face cuts in funding of up to 5%. But states have been on their own in defining what are work activities.

Congress recently instructed the Department of Health and Human Services to draft regulations that would define the 12 work categories cited in federal law. For instance, on-the-job training will be defined, as will community service and unsubsidized employment.

In a recent speech, agency Secretary Mike Leavitt signaled that he wanted stricter definitions of work. He questioned Wisconsin's use of bed rest as a work activity. He also questioned other activities, such as motivational reading.

"Needless to say, I think we can all agree we need to have a better definition of what constitutes work," Leavitt told officials at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

The Government Accountability Office said last year that there were too many differences in how states defined work.

For instance, of 10 states reviewed, five said caring for a disabled family member would meet work participation requirements. Five did not. Six states counted substance-abuse treatment as work, but four did not. Inconsistent definitions make for unreliable comparisons when determining which states do a good job of helping residents find work, the GAO said.

But some social services analysts worry that the new approach could stifle innovative state programs. They say such approaches have helped reduce welfare rolls by 57% over the past decade.

"Every state's economy is different, and states are dealing with different challenges among the welfare recipients that remain on the caseload," said Sheri Steisel, director of human services policy for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Steisel said there can be logical explanations for some activities the administration has ridiculed.

"If a woman is in her ninth month of pregnancy, some states, for example, used bed rest as a way of making sure the recipient didn't lose their welfare assistance while they were either out ill or on bed rest, similar to the real work world where sometimes women have to go on leave prior to the birth of a child," Steisel said.

Changes approved to the nation's welfare program in 1996 set limits on how long people could obtain cash assistance. Since the law went into effect, welfare rolls have dropped from about 4.4 million families to less than 2 million.

SIGNS FOR HOPE SPOTTED IN GLOOMY STATS ON COUNTY'S KIDS

GENESEE COUNTY
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Ron Fonger**rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317**

GENESEE COUNTY - Too many infants in the county are still dying before their first birthday, and an increasing percentage are born weighing too little, according to new numbers from a children's advocacy group.

Priority Children said Tuesday that extra efforts are needed to improve the health of expectant mothers and infants - particularly if the area economy continues to sputter and more people lose health insurance.

But the organization also said there are encouraging trends developing in teen deaths and births to teen mothers.

Gail I. Stimson, president and executive director of Priority Children, said there are no easy fixes, just more work to do.

"We can always use new programs, but on top of that we need to make sure programs we have are being fully utilized," Stimson said. "There's been a concentrated effort to make sure there are really clear and consistent messages out to people about where they can go for help."

Priority Children released information about the state of county children on the heels of an annual Kids Count report that showed teenagers are generally doing better in Michigan in several key areas.

The state report also said the long-term outlook for children in the state may not be so good because of the number of residents in poverty.

Stimson said positives locally include a reduction in teen deaths and a decline in the number of births to teenage mothers.

"It's not that these are great numbers, but there is improvement," she said. "There is commitment from so many people to make (the right things) happen."
Marcia Franks, maternal/infant health supervisor for the Genesee County Health Department, said there also are signs of promise in infant mortality numbers despite county numbers being higher than the state average.

"It does kind of look like we're moving in the wrong direction (but) the bad rates didn't happen overnight (and) it's going to take years to see changes in the (other direction)," Franks said.

Stimson said there is often help for women who are pregnant and need care. She suggests contacting Health Access, a program that helps the uninsured in the county obtain medical care, at (810) 232-4200 for more information.

QUICK TAKE

Good news, bad news

Recent statistics from Priority Children about the well-being of Genesee County's children:

Good news:

The rate of teen (15-19) deaths dropped during the past five years from 91.4 per 100,000 to 59.8 in 2001-2003.

The rate of births to teenage mothers under 20 has dropped from 14.3 percent in 2000 to 11.7 percent of all births in 2004.

Bad news:

Infant mortality continues to be a stubborn problem in the county, running ahead of the state average. The rate shows 11.2 per 1,000 infants died before reaching their first birthday in 2002.

The percentage of low birth weight babies continues to increase - up to 9.9 percent in 2003 from 8.9 percent in 1999.

KIDS NO BETTER OFF THAN IN 2001

State survey paints grim picture of Jackson County

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Susan J. Demas - **sdemas@citpat.com -- 768-4927**
Jackson Citizen Patriot

Is this Jackson, Mich., or Jackson, Miss.?

It's getting harder to tell by looking at rates of infant death and teen pregnancy in a study released Tuesday.

"This is shocking for a state that prides itself in being pro-child and forward-thinking," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of the Kids Count in Michigan project. "Michigan is ranking among the Southern states."

Jackson County children, measured by the Kids Count survey, were no better off in 2004 than three years earlier.

Child advocates say state budget cuts are taking a toll.

There was no significant improvement on any measure of children's well-being -- including poverty, child abuse and health care -- in the report spearheaded by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation.

There was bad news, however.

In 2003, more than eight of every 1,000 kids died at birth in Jackson County -- matching the statewide average, the study reports.

Michigan plunged from 38th to 43rd in the nation, joining a bottom tier of states that includes Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana.

State Rep. Leslie Mortimer said she isn't sure why.

"A lot of people came from the Southern states for auto jobs in Michigan," the Horton Republican said, "so we might have learned their habits."

In Jackson County, one in 20 teens had a baby in 2002 -- about 1.5 times the state average. That's a slight drop from 2001 but still puts the county on par with Kentucky, South Carolina and Alabama.

The poor economy continues to wreak havoc. Child poverty is on the upswing, with more than 10,000 children, 39 percent, eating free and reduced lunches in 2004. That's a jump from 35 percent in 2001.

Nine in 100 kids were abused or neglected in 2004 -- a small decline -- but Jackson still falls among the worst 15 counties.

Michigan fared better than the county in the study. The state saw significant declines in teen deaths, dropout rates and child deaths between 2000 and 2004. The state ranks 27th overall, down from 24th in 2002.

"It's not horrible," said Rep. Rick Baxter, R-Concord. "It's middle-rung, which is not where we want to be. We have to strive to do better in all areas."

Baxter said local governments are best equipped to tackle children's issues, especially with a squeezed state budget. The Legislature can help by stimulating the economy, he said, with measures such as purging the single-business tax.

Sweeping tax cuts since the 1990s have "painted us into a corner" of budget shortfalls and means Michigan is no longer a high-tax state, countered Michigan's Children spokeswoman Michele Corey.

Legislators have slashed spending for children and families from fiscal 2001 to 2006, with millions in cuts to infant mortality prevention, prenatal care and anti-child abuse programs. This "short-sightedness" is showing up in statistics on kids' well-being, Corey said.

Mortimer favors more funds for prevention of social problems, arguing it will save the state money in the long run.

The time to act is now, said Zehnder-Merrell, also a senior research for Michigan League for Human Services.

Teens are doing better, but young children are in jeopardy. In 20 years, Michiganians won't be able to recognize their state, she said.

"Michigan will be a very different place than it is today without making the investment in our children," Zehnder-Merrell said. "We will see our adult population compromised."

COUNTY LAST IN PRENATAL CARE, BUT EXPECTS IMPROVEMENT

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Susan J. Demas - **sdemas@citpat.com -- 768-4927**
Jackson Citizen Patriot

Jackson County mothers have ranked last in Michigan for prenatal care since 1999, but local officials say a reporting glitch makes the problem look worse than it is.

While the new Kids Count survey released Tuesday shows more than half of pregnant women get inadequate health care, Dr. Amy Schultz says Foote Hospital's findings put that figure at 27 percent.

That's much closer to the state average of 22 percent. Foote Hospital reports data to the state.

"We are much better than we thought we were or than the data suggests," said Schultz, director of the Foundation for a Healthy Community, a Foote affiliate.
"But there's always room for improvement."

The problem is that doctors' offices weren't reporting prenatal appointments to Foote fast enough to be included with birth-certificate data, Schultz said.

The Kids Count study should reflect an improvement starting next year, she said.

Jackson County likely still needs to focus on prenatal care, even after the statistical hitch is corrected, said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of the Kids Count in Michigan project.
The county does poorly in related factors, she noted, including teen pregnancy, low birthweight, infant mortality and women smoking while pregnant.

Community leaders founded the Jackson County Prenatal Task Force in 2002. Its aims are preventing preterm labor and delivery; decreasing unintended pregnancies; and cutting alcohol, smoking and drug use among expectant mothers.

JUDGE HALTS PARENTS' VISITS WITH DEAD 5-YEAR OLD'S SIBLINGS

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Paul Janczewski**pjanczewski@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6333**

FLINT - The three siblings of a 5-year-old girl who died in a filthy home after an untreated illness will have no contact with their mother, Michelle L. Bowen, or their fathers until a special advocate evaluates them.

Genesee Probate Judge Robert E. Weiss, who made the ruling Tuesday, also delayed a parental termination hearing for Bowen and her fiance, Jeffery C. Kelley, until autopsy results are available for Rose Kelley, their daughter who died at their east-side home.
Rose, 5, died June 3 at the family's residence, 1606 N. Franklin Ave., after being sick for five days. She was not taken to a doctor.

Her siblings - a 6-year-old brother, 2-year-old sister and 10-year-old half-sister - were removed from the home and are now in foster care.

Jeffery Kelley is the father of the two younger children and Rose. The older girl has a different father.

Weiss said the case will resume July 11 when autopsy results on Rose Kelley should be available, as well as a status report from the special advocate on the other children.
Bowen, 31, the mother of all four children, appeared in court with attorney Kraig Sippell. Kelley, 30, was represented by attorney John A. Tosto.

Police also located Jeffrey Mitchell, the father of the 10-year-old girl, and he was represented by attorney Marc T. Dedenbach.

Attorney Trina Carte represented the three children at the hearing.

Assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Marcie M. Mabry asked Weiss to adjourn the hearing to terminate all parental rights for the trio because an autopsy report isn't available.

The attorneys representing the parents agreed, saying the autopsy information would be a vital part of the case.

Mabry asked that the temporary visitation for the parents stop until the children can get a mental health evaluation and a bonding assessment to determine how close the children are to the parents.

Tosto and Sippell argued that parenting time for Bowen and Kelley should continue, saying it was in a supervised setting, and ending the sessions could be harmful to the children.

But Connie Gertz, the court-appointed special advocate, said one of the children became upset while at foster care and required a visit to Hurley Medical Center's emergency room to calm down his screaming, biting and kicking.
She and Carte recommended to Weiss that parental visits stop until the children are evaluated. Mabry said Mitchell has had little contact with his daughter in the past.

Court documents indicate Rose became too ill to stand or feed herself and died after a five-day illness.

Child Protective Services reports in the court file say case workers visited the family in November 2003, when the 6-year-old boy, a hydrocephalic who is required to wear a helmet, was medically neglected. In December 2004, they returned and discovered he and a girl were missing school with chronic head lice.

Kelley agreed to attend Alcoholics Anonymous classes after alcohol was found in the residence, and Bowen agreed to counseling then.

The next visit was on June 3 when Rose Kelley died.

Bowen initially told police she was too tired from work to take the girl to a doctor. She later told police she feared losing her other children because of the condition of the residence and children.

Case workers and police said the girl had been dead for about five hours when they saw her, and she was severely infested with lice.

Cockroaches and flies were everywhere in the home, which was strewn with garbage, and moldy dog feces were found throughout the basement.

Rose's body appeared malnourished, and her bones were easily visible through her skin, officials said.

Officials said the 2-year-old girl's hair was matted down to her scalp, she had scabies, and head lice and eggs were observed "dropping off" her head. The boy had chipped, discolored teeth.

PROGRESS REPORTED IN BUDGETS, BUT RESOLUTION NOT IMMINENT

Gongwer, Tuesday, June 27, 2006

Legislative and administration officials are coming closer to agreement on some major parts of the 2006-07 budget, particularly the differences over welfare, but it is clear now that the final budget resolution will await until mid- or late July at least.

Officials report they are closer to agreements on the welfare component of the budget – the House had included a time limit of four years on welfare for able-bodied recipients in the budget, while the Senate had said the issue should be dealt with separately, and Governor Jennifer Granholm has opposed proposals she said could leave children without financial protection – but other major areas of the budget, including K-12 school financing, higher education financing, and Medicaid financing changes have yet to be resolved.

Other issues that remain unresolved include how to handle financing for the Detroit-Wayne County community mental health system (the Legislature had approved cuts in the funding, with larger cuts if the agency did not reconstitute itself as an authority).

There were no formal meetings on budget targets held Tuesday and none scheduled for Wednesday, officials said.

But a large number of informal meetings were underway. At one point State Budget Director Mary Lannoye was holding a talk on the Senate floor with Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) and House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi).

During House session, Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) and Rep. Chris Kolb (D-Ann Arbor), who have worked on the welfare reform issue for each of their parties, respectively, also were engaged in several conversations along with House Appropriations Chair Rep. Scott Hummel (R-DeWitt).

Even though officials said they were close to agreements on the welfare proposal, some basic issues were still unresolved. For example, one official said, it was still undecided if the agreement would be included in the budget or enacted separately.

As officials work on that proposal, some sources said discussions on other parts of the budget have slowed.

And while legislative leaders had hoped to finish the budget two weeks ago, it is now "physically impossible" to complete the budget this week, even if there were breakthrough agreements, one source said.

That means, with essentially no legislative resolutions completed during the week of July 4, it will be mid-July or later before the 2006-07 budget is completed, officials said.

CHILD CONVICT MAY ATTEND DELTA

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Reported in Saginaw News

PONTIAC -- Nathaniel Abraham, who shot and killed a man when he was 11, could move to a halfway house in Bay City next month, allowing the 20-year-old to work and enroll in classes at Delta College.

Abraham recently entered a lower-security juvenile lockup and has progressed to the point that Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Moore ruled Monday that he should enter the halfway house in July.

That would allow him to hold a job and attend classes at Delta College.
"We don't do background checks on students," said Delta spokesman Terry L. Rock. "It's an open door institution."

Daniel Bagdade, Abraham's attorney, endorsed the decision, while Deborah Carley, the county's chief deputy prosecutor, was unhappy with it.

Abraham was convicted of second-degree murder in the 1997 shooting death of Ronnie L. Greene, 18, outside a convenience store in Pontiac. Though convicted as an adult, he was sentenced as a juvenile and is scheduled to be freed from all state supervision when he turns 21 on Jan. 19, 2007.

The case sparked debate on the treatment of juveniles accused of violent crimes. He was the first young person charged with first-degree murder who was prosecuted under a 1997 Michigan law that allowed adult prosecutions of children of any age in serious felony cases.

Rock doubts that students and faculty members would object to Abraham enrolling at Delta.
"Most people wouldn't notice unless he's walking around with a sign on his back," Rock said.
"(Delta) is a place where people can come and change their lives. That's part of the community college mission."

YOUNG KILLER HEADED FOR BAY CITY HALFWAY HOUSE

Tuesday, June 27, 2006
By BRIAN CHARLTON
ASSOCIATED PRESS
Reported in the Bay City Times

PONTIAC - Nathaniel Abraham, who shot and killed a man when he was 11, will be moved to a halfway house in Bay City as early as next month.

The plan includes allowing the 20-year-old, now in a lower-security juvenile lockup in Roscommon County, to work and enroll in classes at Delta College.

"We were informed of this by Parmenter House, that they would be having this individual coming here to Bay City," said Deputy Police Chief Gary G. Hect, adding police are not happy about the situation.

"The Oakland County prosecutor said this person has had anger problems and a personality disorder," Hect said.

"We don't need those problems here to deal with. But at this point there is nothing the police can do about it but monitor the situation," Hect said.

The Parmenter House is a halfway house at 706 Fifth St. for younger individuals, mainly those who have been convicted of criminal sexual conduct, according to state officials.

As for plans to attend Delta College, campus police officials said they have not received any information about Abraham and didn't know he was to be enrolled in classes.

Abraham has progressed to the point that Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Moore ruled Monday that he should be allowed to enter the halfway house in Bay City sometime in July.

Daniel Bagdade, Abraham's attorney, endorsed the decision, while Deborah Carley, Oakland County's chief deputy prosecutor, was unhappy with it.

Carley said she always has felt that Abraham should have been sentenced to serve time in an adult prison.

Bagdade said his client will not be a flight risk, given the newfound freedom.

"It's not an issue. He wants to succeed, and he really wants to show people who don't believe in him that he will succeed," Bagdade said.

Abraham was convicted of second-degree murder in the 1997 shooting death of Ronnie Lee Greene, 18, outside a convenience store in Pontiac.

Though convicted as an adult, he was sentenced as a juvenile and is scheduled to be freed from all state supervision when he turns 21 on Jan. 19, 2007.

The case sparked debate on the treatment of juveniles accused of violent crimes. He was the first young person charged with first-degree murder to be prosecuted under a 1997 Michigan law that allowed adult prosecutions of children of any age in serious felony cases.

Abraham's case worker at the Nokomis Challenge Center in Prudenville - the lower-security juvenile facility in which he currently lives - said Monday that Abraham is progressing, but still needs to react better when he is criticized and also needs to improve his empathy skills.

During Monday's hearing, Moore ordered Abraham to stand and describe whether he felt he was ready to go to the Bay City halfway house, a 13-bed facility that is staffed 24 hours a day. "I'd like to receive the benefits and services I can get before I turn 21 and take it one step at a time," Abraham told the judge.

Moore told Abraham that he was at a crossroads and needed to take advantage of his latest opportunity.

"You're the only person in this courtroom who can make decisions - whether you'll change or will offend again," the judge said.

Abraham's next scheduled court date was set for Oct. 23.

HALFWAY HOUSE TO PREP YOUNG KILLER FOR RELEASE

Young killer to move to halfway house to ready for 2007 release; prosecutors object.

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News
June 27, 2006

PONTIAC -- Locked away for nearly a decade, Michigan's youngest convicted killer is moving to a halfway house in two weeks, where he is expected to begin his reassimilation into society.

On Monday, an Oakland County judge signed an order allowing Nathaniel Abraham to be moved from a juvenile facility to Parmenter Criminal Justice Center in Bay City, a low-security halfway house for male delinquents.

"I hope you are successful," Oakland Probate Judge Eugene Moore told Abraham. "You've had all the help you can get at this point ... at the age of 21, you will be out making all these decisions by yourself."

Abraham was 11 years old in 1997 when he fired a sniper shot from a hilltop in Pontiac, killing an 18-year-old man. He was convicted in 1999 of second-degree murder and sentenced by Moore as a juvenile.

"I take it one step at a time," Abraham said.

Prosecutors objected to the move, saying Abraham is not rehabilitated enough to be given such freedoms.

You can reach Jennifer Chambers at (248) 647-7402 or jchambers@detnews.com.

FARING WELL

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By ERIC ENGLISH
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

OSCODA - Up and running for just a month, a new telephone call center in Oscoda is helping people with their state welfare benefits. And it's getting some rave reviews from customers. "We have clients saying they are tickled that someone they can understand is on the phone," said Cindy Walker, operations manager for the new call center.

The work previously was farmed out to call centers in Mexico, India and Florida.

Oscoda-based Crusecom Technology Consultants opened the new center in May as part of a $48 million state contract to provide telephone support services for the Electronic Benefits Transfer system, commonly known as the Bridge card.

The debit cards are used by low-income people in Michigan to purchase food or, in some cases, for cash assistance.

When people lose their cards, have trouble using them or a retailer is having problems operating the Bridge-card system, they call the toll-free number 1-888-678-8914 and it routes them to an automated system. If they need to speak to a person, it's handled by the Oscoda call center.

Arthur Cruse, president of Crusecom, said the call center expects to handle about 2,800 assistance calls a month. Crusecom recently hired 25 full time employees and 24 part-timers for the $7-an-hour jobs of manning the phone system and resolving benefit problems.

The center operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week from its location inside an old officer's residence at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, a community on Lake Huron in northern Iosco County.

Cruse said things are running smoothly just a month into the new venture.

"We have 90 days to get up to certain performance measures, and we are already meeting or exceeding those," Cruse said recently.

People working at the call center say they hear from grateful clients all the time.
"I keep track of the 'Bless yous' I get and I've got a lot of them. You're dealing with people's livelihoods," said Lori, one of the telephone representatives. The Times is withholding last names of call-center employees at the request of Crusecom.

Lori said she was laid off a year ago from her job providing telephone support for an auto supplier. When the opportunity to join Crusecom opened up, she jumped at the chance.
The company received 328 job applications for the positions available, Cruse said.

He used Northeast Michigan's traditionally high unemployment rate as an argument in his five-year effort to convince state officials to stop outsourcing the call centers and bring them back to Michigan.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm signed two executive directives in 2004 giving preference in state government contracts to Michigan-based job providers.

In October 2005, a company called Affiliated Computer Services Inc. won back the Michigan Department of Human Services contract for electronic benefits transfer system support, and Crusecom was hired as a subcontractor for the call center.

"I am thrilled that jobs have been created for a community in need," Granholm said in a prepared statement. "I hope that other entrepreneurs and business owners in Michigan see this as an example of the great opportunities that exist for them right here at home."

The Oscoda company was founded by Cruse, a U.S. Navy veteran with extensive technology experience, and his wife, Leesa. The couple formed the company in Ohio and moved it Michigan in order to be closer to their vacation home in the Oscoda area.

State works to connect families with child support money

Updated: June 26, 2006, 12:46 PM EDT
WoodTV.com

LANSING (AP) -- Michigan has made it easier for parents to find child support money that was collected but never paid to them.

Michigan now holds $11.4 million in unclaimed child support funds.

A recent upgrade to the Human Services Department's Web site allows custodial parents or caregivers to search online for details about the money.

The money was collected by Friend of the Court offices, but caseworkers were unable to find most of the 34,000 people who are owed money.

Some of the money also belongs to people who failed to cash their checks.

SITTER SEXUALLY ASSAULTED BABY, MOTHER REPORTS

POLICE BLOTTER-FLINT
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Kim Crawford - **kcrawford@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6242**

FLINT - A Flint woman who left her year-old daughter with a teenage baby sitter earlier this week told police the baby was sexually assaulted.

The woman told officers she dropped the baby off with a 15-year-old girl in the apartment complex off Lapeer Road at Howard Avenue on Sunday, and the girl called her at 9:30 a.m., telling her to come and get the child, according to a summary of the report.
When the mother picked up her daughter, the teen was no longer in the apartment. When the mother later changed the baby, she found blood in the diaper and took the girl to Hurley Medical Center for medical attention.

Detectives said Tuesday the case was being assigned to the department's juvenile bureau because of the involvement of a teenager.

JUDGE RAKES EX-DAY-CARE PROVIDER OVER ASSAULTS

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By Theresa D. Mcclellan

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Before sentencing a former day-care provider to prison, Kent County Circuit Judge Paul Sullivan noted the supportive letters and e-mails he received from the defendant's family and friends.

Yet no one in the courtroom Tuesday spoke for the young victims of Kristopher Cross, 34. So the judge did.

"These victims are young, and what you have done will affect their lives forever," Sullivan said.
Last month, Cross pleaded no-contest to first-degree sexual assault involving children in the home-based day care he ran with his wife.

He was accused of assaulting three girls younger than 8 between 2002 and 2004 in the home at 2642 Fuller Ave. NE.

His plea was not an admission of guilt, but was treated as such at sentencing.

Sullivan handed the Grand Rapids man 13 to 40 years in prison. A mother of one of the victims was in the courtroom, but declined to comment.

The judge seemed perturbed by the letters from Cross' family and friends, who said Cross was treated unfairly and could not have abused the victims.

Sullivan noted Cross had more than 20,000 images of pornography on his computer. While the majority of the images were adults, there also were pictures of unidentified children, the judge said.

He said because the children assaulted were in a day care, it also was a violation of trust.
Cross' mother, Karen Cross, of Grand Rapids, complained afterward that police had the wrong person and alleged a family acquaintance actually was responsible for the crimes.

As Sullivan talked in court about the case, a woman in the courtroom, waiting to be sentenced for her role in a separate crime, wept quietly.

The woman, who identified herself only as Michelle, and was there to be sentenced for shoplifting, said the case struck a chord in her because she had been molested as a child.
"All the while the judge was talking about his family supporting him, I couldn't stop crying. I kept thinking, 'Because of someone like you thinking it's OK to mess with children, I'm up here now looking like a criminal,' " the 34-year-old Cutlerville woman said.

"(Child molesters) need to know what could happen to the children they molest. I hope those parents can protect their children," she said.

OF BOYS AND BOOTSTRAPS – SOCIAL WORKER TURNS AROUND TOUGH TEENS WITH TOUGH LOVE

Wednesday, June 28, 2006

By Terri Finch Hamilton- **Gazette News Service**

WAYLAND - Lenair Correll hops out of her silver convertible and flip-flops into a foster home in her woven straw sandals.

Inside, two teen boys who have seen a lot of trouble will have their weekly chat with their hip social worker with the pierced nose.

One wants to go visit his mom out of state. Sorry, the courts won't allow it, Correll tells him.

He drums his fingers on the lace tablecloth in agitation and crudely mouths his displeasure.
``It's all on you," she tells him. ``You need to make some better decisions."

The two of them have gotten off to a rocky start. Correll knows the drill. It'll be this way for a while. Soon, chances are, he'll wonder what he ever did without her.

Correll, 34, specializes in helping tough teen boys in foster care. When she gets them, they're often mouthy, disrespectful, troubled by mental illness or learning disorders, in trouble with the law.

With a mix of compassion and tough love, she tries to steer them back to the right path. Part of her job is taking them to their court dates, which are often all over the state.

During the first car trip with a kid, she asks silly questions -- what's your favorite color? If you had a million dollars, what would you do with it? If you could be anybody, who would you be?

As she gets to know them, the car questions get deeper.

What's your greatest accomplishment? If you had to tell somebody a deep, dark secret, what would it be? Who in the world knows you best?

Sometimes, their answer to that last question throws her.

More than one kid has answered, ``You do."
The boys she helps all live with foster parents through a program at DA Blodgett for Children called the Parent Therapist Program. Designed for teens who need extra support, the program places them with foster parents who have been trained extensively to meet their many needs.

At age 17 or 18, they'll be out on their own, graduates of foster care. Correll's job is to make sure they're ready.

Over the past seven years, she's watched dozens head out into the world, struggling and triumphing, some becoming fathers, some buying houses, others ending up homeless or in jail.

She's had a rough year. Several of her boys have been in trouble with the law, stealing cars and breaking into a house.

``I've taken a beating this year," Correll says. ``It's been so frustrating. They know right from wrong. They know they shouldn't steal a car. They have this attitude, `Everybody thinks I'm a loser, so I must be a loser. So I'll do loser things.'

``One kid from last year I had really high hopes for," she says. ``He went to prison."

She holds up a letter from him, several pages long, she just found in her mailbox. She hasn't read it yet. It's just one of several letters that have stuffed her mailbox lately as the teen struggles behind bars.

``It's gut-wrenching to get these letters," Correll says. She always writes back. She tells him to be good, be strong. She always includes an inspirational quote, culled from her stash of quote books. ``Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labor does the body," is one of her favorites. ``I love the power of words," she says.

She's put utilities in her name for 17-year-olds on their own who can't get them. She's used her own money to buy bipolar medication for a teen in jail. She takes kids shopping for clothes when they're out in the world, floundering.

``This is for kids who are no longer on her caseload," says Lona Clairmont, a DA Blodgett foster mother for 20 years who has worked with Correll for seven.

``It's no longer her job. It's humanity.

``I've been a foster parent for 20 years, and I haven't seen one social worker who puts their soul out there like Lenair," Clairmont says.

Extraordinary measures

Some of the things Correll does make her boss, Mary Jo Sabaitis, wince.

``She teaches them how to drive in her car on country roads," Sabaitis says. ``Aaaaagggh! It's not something we'd promote."

Correll insists her kids take the SAT.

``If they say, `I don't feel like it,' she won't accept that," Sabaitis says. ``She'll say, `Get your butt over here.' Then she'll hold their hand.

``Lenair opens doors for them that no one else would," Sabaitis says. ``She shows them what it feels like to get an education. Even if they go for three months then drop out, they've had a glimpse of a life that goes beyond crime, beyond substance abuse, beyond life on the dole."

The other day, Correll got a phone call from Matt Fuller, who graduated from high school -- and her caseload -- two years ago to strike out on his own.

``He said, `Lenair, I just closed on my first house an hour ago,' " she says. ``He was so excited. It made me feel good that something good happened to him, and he called me."

Fuller, 21, now a tool-and-die maker, says of course he called Lenair.

``She's like part of my family," he says. ``She's always been there.

``When I moved out on my own, she went crazy trying to get me stuff -- a toaster, utensils," he says. ``I thought I was just gonna move out with nothing. She's always showing that she cares, always asking if everything is all right."

Weighty reality

``It gets overwhelming," she says.

Correll feels a sort of kinship with the teens she helps. She knows something about adversity.

At 15 months old, she was diagnosed with a rare yolk-sack tumor. Her mom says there are only 100 known cases of it in the world. It affects the cells that line the yolk sac of the embryo cells that develop in the unborn baby and eventually become the reproductive system.

She was given a 2 percent chance to survive past the age of 3.

``Many, many times, the doctors told us, `This will be it,' " Lenair's mom, Geri Correll, says from a Grand Rapids law office where she's a legal assistant.

``They told her dad to start looking for, for, you know ..." Even now, she can't say it. They told Lenair's parents to look for a place to bury her.

But Lenair hung on. She had chemotherapy for 2 years. And rounds of radiation.

She spent most of her childhood in the hospital, as complication after complication arose from her tumor. She endured close to 20 surgeries through childhood, at hospitals all across the country.

``I'm ridiculously tough," Correll says. ``The stuff I've been through defines a lot of who I am, but most people don't know it. So I feel like most people don't know the real me."

``She tells those boys they have to be strong, to never give up," her mom says. ``She knows what she's talking about."

Correll is independent, no nonsense. But she's also a ``girly girl," she says, who loves clothes and manicures and painted her bedroom hot pink.

She wears a tiny rhinestone stud in her nose, the result of a Hawaiian vacation with a friend. In the middle of getting a tattoo, her friend said she had to stop -- it hurt too much. Finish, Correll told her, and I'll get my nose pierced.

Later, when hula dancers shimmied at a luau, Correll joined in. She dares.

``She has a joy for life because she has life," Sabaitis, Correll's supervisor, says. ``Lenair lives for the moment and for tomorrow."

Good news two ways

Like any supervisor, Sabaitis is happy that a story about Correll also sheds light on her program. They need more foster parents. But there's something else, she says.

``There are all kinds of people who have children dealing with cancer," Sabaitis says. ``They probably wonder sometimes, what kind of life will this kid have? Well, Lenair has gone through this. Look how she's contributing to society. Look what a difference she's made in these kids' lives -- when there was a time she didn't know if she'd have a life herself."

She celebrates life with food and shoes. Correll always wears the trendiest shoes, walking in them with a slight limp, the result of hip surgery related to her cancer.

A big time foodie, she stuffs pork loin with artichokes and sun-dried tomatoes and secretly dreams of being a caterer.

``If I've had a really bad day, there's nothing better than grabbing a grocery cart and heading down the aisle," she says.

Correll's friendships bolster and sustain her. Many of her friends have kids. She goes to their soccer games and camping trips. She can't have biological children, a result of her cancer. She's thought about adopting.

``I'm giving myself till I'm 38," she says.

`They see a person'

They know her sore spots, too. When Correll went through a painful breakup a while back, her boys consoled her.

``I do let down my guard sometimes," she says. ``They don't just see this person who's working with them. They see a person."

She's cute, stylish, drives a convertible and she cares about them. You'd think these teen boys would fall for her.

``I've never seen it happen," Lona Clairmont, a friend, says. ``Sometimes, when she stops at school, I'll hear kids say to her boys, `She's hot.' The boys will say, `What? It's Lenair.'

``It's a love-hate thing," Clairmont says. ``She'll come walking into group therapy with ice cream bars. They know how much she cares about them. But she's also the one who tells them they can't leave the state for their grandmother's surgery. Ultimately, she has the hammer.

``It's a very fine line that she walks," Clairmont says.

A graduate of Calvin College and Grand Valley State University, Correll worked in Lansing for two years in foster care before coming to DA Blodgett in 1999. She planned to stay two years. It's been seven.

The boys keep her here. Who else will tell them bluntly to ``just suck it up."

``So you've had this rotten life," she says. ``You have to get over it and move on.

``There are times I yell at them," Correll says, ``which is not a very social-worker-like thing to do. When they steal a car, I don't say, `Now, why do you think you did that?' I say, `What the hell did you think you were doing?'

``They'll say, `I know this isn't what you wanted for me.' I'll say, `You're right. I'm disappointed. This isn't what I want for you.' "

She sighs.

``Sometimes, I want so much more for them than they want for themselves," she says. ``You can't expect them all to be scholars. They've been through so much. But I want them to be safe. I want them to be law-abiding citizens, at the minimum. I want them to think more of themselves. Like I do."

KID PORN CHARGES AIRED IN COURT

Wednesday, June 28, 2006
By John Agar - **The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP -- As Kentwood's deputy fire chief, Mark Smith frequently stood before cameras and reporters at emergency scenes.

On Tuesday, Smith, with his wife seated behind him in court, stood before a judge -- plus three television cameras and a Press photographer -- to hear allegations that he possessed child pornography, allegations that, if proven, could send him to prison .

Smith, 49, who who resigned from the fire department Friday, said little at Tuesday's arraignment, and he spoke softly when he had to speak.

With attorney Jeffrey O'Hara at his side, he told the judge he understood the charges: possession of child-sexually abusive material and using a computer to possess the material.

Grand Rapids District Judge Sara Smolenski set a July 10 probable-cause hearing, and allowed Smith, who turned himself in, to remain free on a personal-recognizance bond.

His attorney said Smith has cooperated with police and prosecutors. Police said in court records that he "made admissions" regarding the materials found on a laptop computer police seized from his Byron Center home.

Police say he downloaded child porn from the Internet.

Kentwood police began investigating after Smith quit a part-time job at DK Security, where he worked since 1996, in March.

In a technician's review of his computer at DK Security, officials became concerned and contacted police.

Investigators used a search warrant to seize his home computer, which turned up "images of sexually abusive material," police said in court records.

As a bond condition, Smith cannot use a home computer his wife uses for her job. Smith told the judge he also used it to teach classes in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but the judge said: "She should be using that, and not you."

If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

Send e-mail to the author: jagar@grpress.com

WAYNE CO. TO DEMOLISH OLD JUVENILE CENTER

No plans yet for Detroit property once it's razed

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER
June 28, 2006

Wayne County has decided to demolish its former juvenile detention facility, which has deteriorated into an eyesore and a magnet for garbage since its closure in 1999, making residents who live in a nearby housing complex feel unsafe.

Located near I-75 and Warren in Detroit, the hulking structure on nearly four acres has become a nettlesome source of frustration and concern for residents with its broken windows, graffiti and eerie, dark presence at night.

Residents of the housing complex across the street welcomed the news and suggested that the county consider turning the property into a park or a recreation center.

"It'll free up space for something else," said Sarah McFarland, 34. "It does look bad over there."
The facility's maintenance costs also have been a drain for taxpayers, totaling $171,934 from the 1999-2000 through the 2004-05 fiscal years, coming out of funds that otherwise would have been used on youth programs.

The county could have to spend another $112,500 through the 2007-08 fiscal year, according to the county auditor general, who issued a report earlier this year urging the county to come up with a plan for the structure.

Carla Sledge, Wayne County's chief financial officer, said the county considered selling the property, but there were no solid offers, and the cost of renovating the structure, which opened in 1960, was astronomical.

"We just figured it would probably be better to demolish it than sell it," she said.
At this point, the county has not decided what to do with the property once the building is razed, Sledge said.

County Executive Robert Ficano, as part of a five-year capital improvement plan that he unveiled this month, has recommended spending $500,000 in the 2008-09 fiscal year to demolish the building.

Sledge said it's common for projects in the capital plan to be done earlier or later, although she said she is confident the demolition would occur as scheduled.

The site is surrounded by county buildings still in use: the Medical Examiner's Office, Lincoln Hall of Juvenile Justice, the Old Juvenile Court and Children's Mental Health Clinic.
There also are some new developments in the area, like the Plymouth Educational Center charter school and the Federal Reserve Bank.

Dee Smith, 20, said converting the land back into use would be a boost to the community.
"As long as they do something positive -- something for the kids," he said.

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

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Homeless shelter gets $70,000 gift

The New Hope Day Center, under threat of closure since April when it learned its appeal of a federal funding denial was rejected, received a $70,000 private donation this week.

That donation, combined with the city of Lansing's annual grant contribution of $100,000 and assistance from the Capital Area United Way, will keep the Volunteers of America Michigan shelter open through the end of the year.

The shelter is on North Larch Street. It is open Monday [illegible] and provides daytime shelter, [illegible] housing resources, clothing vouchers, counseling and other services to more than 100 homeless people daily.

UNGER QUIETLY WAITS IN JAIL FOR SENTENCING

He faces mandatory life in prison at a July 18 hearing for the murder of his wife in 2003.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News
June 26, 2006

BEULAH -- In less than a month, a Huntington Woods man inside the Benzie County Jail is expected to learn where he will likely spend the rest of his life.

Following an eight-week trial, Mark Unger, 45, was convicted Wednesday of first-degree murder in his wife's October 2003 death at a northern Michigan lakeside resort. Officials said the formal sentencing is set for July 18 before Benzie Circuit Court Judge James M. Batzer.

Although first-degree murder carries a mandatory sentence with no parole, a pre-sentence evaluation of every defendant is done by the Michigan Department of Corrections to help determine what is appropriate -- not only according to established sentencing guidelines but also specific to the defendant based on his medical concerns, background and behavioral problems, if any.

That evaluation, which can include letters from family and friends as part of an impact statement, will be forwarded to Batzer for consideration before he passes sentence. Unger, who did not testify in his own defense, also will be afforded an opportunity to make a statement in court. He has been pretty quiet since being convicted last week, Benzie Undersheriff Joe Barone said.

"He's doing fine," Barone said of Unger. "After the verdict he seemed quite relaxed, sat in his cell with his arms folded behind his head."

Barone said the former mortgage broker -- the subject of an hour-long ABC "Primetime" broadcast last week titled "Accident or Murder? Death on the Deck" -- was placed on a suicide watch as a precaution, not because of any behavior exhibited by Unger, Barone stressed.

"Anyone who is involved in a serious crime and found guilty gets special attention for several days, and we are keeping a close watch on him," said Barone, who said Unger has been a model prisoner at the facility since March.
Barone said Unger was visited by his attorneys on Wednesday and Thursday and is back to being one of 36 prisoners held in the county jail. Outside of attorneys, Unger is permitted two visitors a week for 40 minutes. He is able to walk within his cellblock during the day, use a telephone with a prepaid calling card and watch cable TV. He also has access to the jail library.

Defense attorney Robert S. Harrison said he plans an appeal of Unger's sentence and expects after July 18 Unger would be moved to a still-to-be-determined state facility.

Shawn Anchak, a parole and probation officer for the state, said he has just begun his investigation into Unger's background.

"One of the big things in this particular case will be to get statements from the victims, in this case Florence Unger's family, on record," he said.

After sentencing, Unger will be transported to the Charles Egeler Reception and Guidance Center in Jackson for processing.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

PHONY KATRINA VICTIM MUST ATONE IN PUBLIC

By Jen Marckini - Lansing State Journal
Published June 28, 2006

Kim Horn will have to stand in front of hundreds of students, telling them how she cheated her community.

She can't own a cell phone because the one she accepted as a gift was based on a lie.

And she must clean up the house where she lived while she abused the kindness of strangers. "Get your rubber gloves and get prepared," Ingham County Circuit Judge Beverley Nettles-Nickerson told the Mason woman Tuesday.

Horn, 42, was sentenced for lying about being a Hurricane Katrina victim last year after she came back to Mason, her hometown.

People responded by showering her and her 6-year-old daughter with gifts, money - even a place to live.

Horn, who lied for a front-page State Journal story featuring her as a Katrina survivor, blamed her actions on having fled an abusive relationship.

"I was upset," Horn told the judge. "I had no place to live."

Nettles-Nickerson told her she has to take responsibility for what she did: "You started the ball rolling." Horn, who pleaded guilty to larceny under false pretenses, faced up to five years in prison.

The judge sentenced her to time served in jail: 279 days. Horn left the courtroom a free woman with many restrictions.

Among them:
• She must be on probation for three years.
• She must speak at every Mason school, admitting what she did and explaining what she learned from it. Nettles-Nickerson ordered her not to mention that she fled from an abusive relationship nor to blame her behavior on that in any way.
• She must pay restitution of $4,144 to the city of Mason and $217 to the American Red Cross, in addition to fees and fines during her probation.

James White, Horn's attorney, said the sentence was appropriate.

He said Horn will now get a job and work to be reunited with her daughter, who has been living with relatives.

Horn had relocated from Louisiana last year, but she didn't live near a hurricane-ravaged area. Prosecutor Nick Bostic said Tuesday that there are plenty of services in the area for women seeking refuge from abusive relationships.

"Battered women do not need to pretend to be hurricane victims to get assistance," he said.
Mason City Administrator Martin Colburn said he is satisfied with Horn's sentence.

"Hopefully, this is a message and a deterrent to those who have considered defrauding us in the future," he said. "We hope that she stands to her obligation."

Sentence

Kim Horn's three-year probation requires her to:

• Speak to students at all Mason public schools about her poor judgment.

• Send apology letters to the State Journal and other local newspapers for the community to read.
• Perform 1,000 hours of community service; at least 10 hours a week must be for the city of Mason.
• Pay $4,361 in restitution, plus fees during probation.
• Get a job working at least 30 hours a week.
• Clean up the house where she lived, which belongs to the city of Mason.
• Return all donated items in excellent condition.
• Not own a cell phone.

Contact Jen Marckini at 267-1301 or jmarckini@lsj.com.