Department of Human Services

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Wednesday, July 27, 2005

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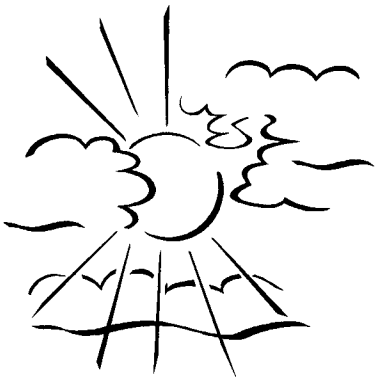

*Important story at this spot

TOPIC	PAGE
*Kids Count Report	2-7
*Adoption	8
Health Care	9-15
Child Day Care	16
Domestic Violence	17
Early Childhood Development	18-19
Juvenile Justice	20-21
Child Abuse	22-23
Elder Abuse	24-25
Homelessness	26
Americans with Disabilities Act	27-30
Poverty Reduction	31-32
Charities	33

State's kids feeling effects of the economy

Study: More are living in poverty

July 27, 2005

BY TERESA MASK and CHASTITY PRATT
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITERS

Michigan had about 108,000 children living in homes with no working parents in 2003 -- a figure that skyrocketed by 33,000 from 2000.

"It's one of the biggest increases in the country," said Bill O'Hare, author of the KIDS Count Data Book, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The data also show a 14-percent increase in the number of Michigan children living in poverty.

O'Hare, a former Flint resident who now works in Baltimore, estimates that the downturn of the economy is the biggest culprit. With the loss of jobs, some parents have been unable to get reliable, full-time work, he said.

Michigan's unemployment rate of 6.8% is among the worst in the nation, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and it's double what it was 2000. It was 7.2% in 2003.

The poverty information is based on data collected from 2000 to 2003 and gives a snapshot of the well-being of children in Michigan and across the country. Overall, Michigan falls in the middle, at No. 25, but there are areas of concern.

Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a senior researcher at the Michigan League for Human Services, said the number of children living in poverty in Michigan has worsened to about one out of three -- with the bulk of them living in the city of Detroit.

That's why it's imperative that legislators maintain funding for programs such as food stamps, Medicaid and child care, Zehnder-Merrell said.

Marianne Udow, director of the state's Department of Human Services, which handles food stamp and welfare programs, said the Kids Count report appears to be an accurate reflection of what is happening in the state and the nation. Since December 2000, the number of Michigan families who receive food assistance jumped 87 percent from 254,923 to 477, 266, according to the DHS.

Udow said expanding programs such as the 39 family resource centers DHS opened in schools will reduce poverty by educating parents and enhancing early childhood education -- if the next state budget leaves room for 10 new centers.

She said the keys to fighting childhood poverty will be "comprehensive help, early intervention and help succeeding in school."

So far, the budgets proposed by the state Senate and House of Representatives would cut the DHS staff, training, child care and cash payments to needy families, Udow said. "That would be a real tragedy," she said.

Based on 10 key indicators in the Kids Count report, Michigan fared better this year in five. The biggest improvement occurred with high school dropouts -- the rate fell by 40 percent.

Experts say that trend might be attributed to the poor economy: kids staying in school because they can't find jobs.

There was a 1% increase in low birth-weight babies and a more dramatic rise -- 10 percent -- in the number of children with parents who hadn't had a full-time job in the past year.

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

Joblessness hurts more kids

A third of Michigan youth grow up with adults who don't work full time, hindering their futures.

By Joe Menard and Ron French / The Detroit News

One-third of all Michigan children live in homes where no adult holds a full-time, year-round job, according to a report released today by Kids Count in Michigan. More than 100,000 kids live in homes where no adult works at all.

The annual report, which catalogues the state of Michigan's children, documents a 44 percent increase between 2000 and 2003 in the number of children living in homes where no adult has worked in the past 12 months.

"We haven't seen any sign that those conditions have changed," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services, which co-authored the report. "It's not surprising, given the stagnation of jobs in Michigan and its high unemployment rate.

"We're having a crisis here where people cannot find jobs," Zehnder-Merrell said.

The biggest impact may be on the smallest victims. Children growing up in homes without steadily employed parents suffer a variety of economic aftershocks, from poorer school performance to higher incarceration rates. They also are less likely to learn the work-ethic skills needed to get and keep a job.

"That number is devastating and sad," said Jim Perry, executive director of the Downriver Community Conference, a job training center in Southgate. "When you have a household like that, the household can become dysfunctional."

Michigan's high unemployment rate (6.8 percent in June) has increased the number of children living in poverty.

But the 2003 report, similar to ones produced in each state, shows that Michigan is about average in many key measures of childhood health and security.

In 2000, about 75,000 Michigan children lived in homes in which no adult worked at all for the entire year; by 2003, that number had risen to 108,000, or 4 percent of all children in the state.

About 50 percent of those children live in urban areas, 27 percent in the suburbs and 23 percent in rural areas, Zehnder-Merrell said.

Published July 27, 2005

State child poverty rate rises by 14%
One-third of kids in Mich. have a parent without a steady job

By Amy F. Bailey
Associated Press

One-third of Michigan's children do not live with a parent who has a steady job, according to a new report released as state lawmakers consider limiting cash assistance and health benefits available to poor families.

About 108,000 children, or 4 percent of the state's population under 18, were living in a household where no adult worked in the past year, according to the latest Kids Count in Michigan report to be released today.

The report covers data from 2000-03.

Michigan ranked 25th overall among the 50 states based on 10 key measures, including the number of children living in poverty and those living in a family with a steady income.

The state lost ground on two measures. The child poverty rate went up by 14 percent and the number of children in families without a full-time, year-round job increased by 10 percent in the three-year period reviewed for the report.

One in every six children in Michigan lived with a family earning less than the poverty level, or $18,660 a year for a family of two adults and two children in 2003.

Although the data used for the report is a few years old, the state's slow economy has not changed significantly.

Michigan's unemployment rate has hovered around 7 percent since the beginning of 2003 and has been among the highest in the country in recent months.

"We have an economy that has the expectation that there will be a certain amount of unemployment, but people still need to live. People need to be able to survive a downturn in the economy," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for the Lansing-based advocacy group Michigan League for Human Services.

Zehnder-Merrell said programs set up to help families who have little or no income or health benefits are being targeted for reduction or elimination by state lawmakers trying to balance next year's budget.

The nearly $40 billion spending plan for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 approved by the Republican majority in the state House would end Medicaid coverage to about 43,000 people and stop welfare payments to about 15,000 who have been receiving assistance for at least four years.

Supporters of the House-approved spending plan said the Medicaid reductions were among the difficult cuts they had to make to balance the budget without raising taxes and fees.

"It's difficult in this economy," Zehnder-Merrell said. "The first people who lost their employment were people who were marginally employed to begin with, who didn't have the skills or education."

About 40 percent of those children lived in homes where the adults were physically or mentally handicapped in a way that hindered their ability to hold jobs; another 40 percent stayed home because they had no child care available.

An even larger problem is the number of kids living in homes in which the adults are only marginally employed. In 2003, 34 percent of Michigan's children lived in homes where no adult held a full-time job, up from 31 percent in 2000.

Higher unemployment and job instability have led to an increase in children living in poverty. The percentage of Michigan children living in poverty increased to 16 percent in 2003, from 14 percent in 2000.

Evidence of the problem is clear to John Kastler, vice president of program services at Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan. He said about 25 percent to 30 percent more people since 2000 are seeking daily assistance through the food bank and its affiliated social organizations, such as churches and community groups.

"Whenever there are job losses or cutbacks, it trickles down," he said, adding that more than 60,000 people are served daily by the food bank's 450 participating agencies.

He estimates more than 40 percent of those people are younger than 18.

Children growing up in poverty are more likely to end up in prison and less likely to attend college.

"It's scary to think how marginal their lives must be," Zehnder-Merrell said. "You're less likely to have a stable home. Once you start moving frequently, you lose stability in health care, education, relationship with friends, family and neighborhood. If you have parents mired in poverty, it leads to depression and frustration."

The stress of unemployment has hurt Lisa Hardin's relationship with her 7-year-old son, JaVontay.

"Sometimes I take it out on him," said Hardin, 34, of Romulus. "I'm not as patient as I used to be with him. I yell more than I used to."

Hardin was laid off after 11 years at National City Bank. She was unemployed for two years, then worked for a temp agency for 11 months, and has been unemployed for the past eight months.

"Emotionally, it affects me," Hardin said. "I'm working harder not to show that (to my son), because it's not his fault. For that matter, it's not my fault; it's the economy."

At the Downriver Community Conference, job training is coupled with family counseling.

"The first thing we ask is, 'Are there kids at home? How are they affected by this?'" Perry said. "A loss of a stable income is a disruptive aspect in your life. There are breakups of families; kids sometimes enter the drug world."

This generation's unemployment can affect the job prospects of the next, said Laura Beavers, research associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Md., which coordinates Kids Count.

"If a child grows up in a neighborhood with high unemployment rates, they are more likely to lack connection to employment," Beavers said. "Even the (concept) that everybody gets up and goes to work" is instilled in children by parents.

The report comes out at a moment when the Michigan Legislature is considering cutting benefits to the poor. The House version of Michigan's proposed budget for next year would limit welfare recipients to a total of four years of cash assistance. Officials in the Michigan Department of Human Services estimate that would knock about 48,000 people off of public assistance, including 36,000 children.

The Senate version of the budget does not include the cuts.

Zehnder-Merrell cautioned that things could get worse if the economy doesn't improve and if state and national lawmakers continue to slash social programs in an effort to balance their budgets.

"We're really hurting in Michigan in terms of the impact of the economy on kids," she said. "We need to have programs in place that blunt the effects of poverty for our next generation."

In the Romulus home he shares with his unemployed mother, JaVontay Hardin hopes that happens soon.

"He says, 'Mommy, when are you going to find a job?'" Lisa Hardin said. "I say, 'Hopefully soon.'"

You can reach Joe Menard at (248) 647-7429 or jmenard@detnews.com.

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

Michigan isn't fulfilling its duty to children
Kids Count report shows children slipping in health and safety

The Detroit News

Michigan's children are worse off today than they were in the year 2000 primarily because Michigan's economy isn't creating jobs.

The latest Kids Count Michigan report, prepared as part of a national study, finds that the health and economic conditions of children in this state continue to slip.

More than 100,000 children in Michigan live in homes where no adult holds a job. This has impact on the quality of life of those children today, and on their ability to build for themselves a productive future.

The report also finds that one-third of state children live below or near the poverty line, and in those low-income homes where adults do have a job, one-third of the time the employment is not secure.

Michigan is among the bottom tier of states in infant mortality and has slipped slightly in the percent of low-birth weight babies.

Overall, Michigan ranks a mediocre 25th in the condition of its children.

This isn't nearly good enough. Gov. Jennifer Granholm pledged to make children and education a priority when she took office in 2004, and yet conditions for children have worsened under her watch. The state continues to slash spending on programs aimed at helping children.

The most effective solution is to quickly boost a state economy that hasn't participated in the 3-year-old national economic recovery. Michigan can best help its children by helping its adults find jobs.

Beyond that, some attention most be given to the deterioration of the family infrastructure, and on the lackluster culture of education in this state.

One-fourth of state children live in single-parent homes; 11 percent live in households where no adult finished high school.

Those are fixes that will take time to produce results. For the short-term, Michigan's political leaders must examine their budget priorities and do a better job of meeting their commitment to protect the state's children.

No decision yet in adoption struggle

Barring public from hearing was legal

July 27, 2005

BY KIM NORTH SHINE
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Devin Alexander, the 6-year-old boy whose foster parents and blood relatives are in a battle to adopt him, is still between homes.

During a brief hearing Tuesday in Wayne County Family Court, Devin was interviewed in Judge Sheila Gibson Manning's chambers.

The judge, however, did not reach a decision on his adoption because testimony has yet to be completed.

The so-called best-interest hearing is scheduled to resume at 1:30 p.m. Monday, and it is unknown whether the judge will issue her opinion immediately or later in writing.

The judge must decide whether Devin belongs with foster parents Scott and Rhonda Porter of Taylor or with Lawanda Harrison of Detroit, his biological aunt who lives with his half-sister, grandmother and other relatives.

His drug-addicted mother lost custody of him for abandonment and neglect.

A Free Press reporter and other people were barred from the best-interest hearing on Monday after the judge's deputy said adoption hearings are closed to the public. The newspaper told Devin's story Monday on its front page.

The reporter had attended a previous adoption hearing and family members have attended hearings since they began eight months ago.

Immediately following the ejection from the courtroom, Free Press attorney Herschel Fink said the closure was improper and possibly illegal.

But on Tuesday, he said there appeared to be a statute that permitted the closure, though the judge should have stated the reason for it.

Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly said Tuesday that the statute indeed closes adoption hearings to the public.

As for not closing previous hearings, Kelly said, "in the event that it happened, it was inappropriate. ... It's incumbent on a judge to close an adoption hearing."

At Tuesday's hearing, Harrison and her attorney Michael Williams objected to the judge meeting privately with Devin. Their concern is that Devin will favor the Porters since he has been living with them since he was 22 months old. He's not had the chance to bond with his biological family, Harrison said.

In addition, they were concerned that Devin might be coached on what to tell the judge.

Gibson Manning ignored the objection.

Contact KIM NORTH SHINE at 313-223-4557 or kshine@freepress.com

Governors Urge Focus on Medicaid

States Want More Flexibility to Administer Program, Reduce Cost

By Dan Balz
Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, July 26, 2005; Page A17

As Congress and President Bush have sparred over Social Security and the federal judiciary this year, the top legislative priority of the nation's governors has not changed. Republican and Democratic state executives say nothing is more important to the states than restructuring Medicaid, and they worry that the federal government has not gotten the message.

Medicaid was not part of the official agenda at the National Governors Association summer meeting in Des Moines earlier this month, but it was a regular topic of discussion at the governors-only sessions.

As Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour (R) put it, "It's a real problem, and it is a here-and-now problem. There's nothing theoretical about it. . . . It's a problem that's crushing states today."

Last month, the governors, led by Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R) and Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner (D), the current and past chairmen of the NGA, presented Congress with a bipartisan proposal designed to give states more flexibility to administer the program and to save some money. Governors offered their proposal as a counter to more significant cuts recommended by the Bush administration.

Rising health care costs, particularly for prescription drugs and long-term care, have devastated state Medicaid budgets. Now the states face $10 billion in cuts in the federal share of the program over the next five years. In Des Moines, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) met privately with the governors and, according to several governors who were there, suggested that their proposal will be taken seriously by his committee this fall.

"We're realists, and if those cuts are going to occur, we'd like them fashioned in a way that has the least fiscal impact on us and has the least effect on the provision of benefits to individuals," said Pennsylvania Gov. Edward G. Rendell (D). "I think Senator Grassley gave us reason to be optimistic on both those."

The governors' plan includes recommendations aimed at decreasing prescription drug costs, tightening the rules on transferring assets from one generation to another to qualify for Medicaid, allowing more co-pays and other cost-sharing policies and providing greater flexibility to structure benefits packages for recipients.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities criticized the cost-sharing proposal, arguing that co-pays, premiums or deductibles could result in reduced care for poor women and children, for whom the program was originally designed. Most low-income recipients are now protected from such payments. "NGA's proposal appears to erase all of these longstanding protections," the group said in a critique issued several weeks ago.

Governors offered divergent views of the criticism. Iowa just introduced major changes to its program, including small premiums. Gov. Tom Vilsack (D) said the initial response has been good and that a number of Iowans have said they prefer to contribute something to their care.

"Americans want to pay for health care for their kids," he said. Rendell said his state raised co-pays on prescription drugs from $6 to $8 "without a peep."

But Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne (R) said his state has resisted co-pays as part of the package of changes made in recent years. Co-pays, he said, could backfire and result in higher overall costs. "If you impose a co-pay, they may choose not to go get the medication, and we think there is a far greater cost to the system if they do not get that medication," he said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, at the urging of Congress, has appointed a Medicaid commission to examine the future of the program, and although governors were to be included on the commission, they have declined for now, preferring to argue on behalf of their proposal from the outside.

During a conference call among the governors, Michigan Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm (D) offered her opinion that governors should not participate on the commission for now, and that view was backed, somewhat unexpectedly by Barbour. The action helped to solidify the bipartisan consensus among the governors on both substance and strategy.

The commission will report back Sept. 1 on how to save $10 billion over five years. By the end of the year, the commission must recommend more significant restructuring to ensure the program's long-term solvency. For that discussion, the governors are likely to be back at the table.

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen (D), who has faced a storm of protests over proposals that could cut 300,000 people from his state's TennCare program, said states can weather the upcoming cuts now working their way through Congress. But he said bigger changes are needed and Washington needs to start paying attention. Pointing to the rising costs in every state, he said, "There's no state that has the revenue growth or revenue base to support that kind of thing going forward."

1:54 PM PDT, July 26, 2005

Giveaway Program Improving Drug Industry's Tarnished Image

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Los AngelesTimes Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- A new drug industry clearinghouse has helped about a quarter of a million people obtain free or low cost prescriptions in the first 100 days since its inception, industry officials said today.

The improved giveaway program — and the upcoming unveiling of self-imposed limits on pharmaceutical advertising — are part of a campaign by the industry to repair its image and head off legislation allowing U.S. consumers to import low-cost prescriptions from other industrialized countries.

Drug companies "are getting it," W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, a former congressman who heads the main drug industry lobbying group, said at a press conference. Tauzin issued a progress report on the Partnership for Prescription Assistance, which helps patients obtain free or low-cost medicines.

"You can't make products that extend human life ... without making sure those products are available to people who otherwise would not have access to them," said Tauzin, president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

Next week, the industry will announce a voluntary code of ethics for drug advertising that is directly aimed at consumers. Tauzin said it will include a pledge to refrain from promoting a new drug to patients until doctors are educated about its benefits and risks.

With nearly half of all Americans taking at least one prescription, the cost of drugs has become a major budget issue for families, employers and government programs. In Congress, a coalition of Democrats and populist Republicans hopes to overcome Bush administration objections and pass legislation this fall that would allow drug imports.

The prescription aid program is the industry's first attempt to coordinate access to more than 180 assistance efforts administered by individual drug companies. In the past, doctors usually had to apply for free medicines for their patients. But most physicians were not aware of all the programs, and many doctors found the paperwork too much trouble.

The new industry effort simplified the process, setting up a call center and a website through which patients can find the particular assistance program that covers their prescriptions, and apply directly for benefits.

The call center can be reached by dialing 1-888-477-2669, while the Internet site is at www.pparx.org

Patients who do not have prescription drug coverage through an employer or government

program and who earn less than twice the federal poverty level are eligible. The income limit is $19,000 for an individual or $31,000 for a family of three.

Some 600,000 people have contacted the program since it was established in April. Of those, about 300,000 have completed the paperwork and more than 240,000 are receiving medications, said H. Wesley Metheny, a vice president of the pharmaceutical industry group.

Tauzin said drug companies provide more than $4 billion in free medications a year to 6 million patients who can't afford them, but that represents only about half of those who could be helped.

Dr. Mary Frank, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, said the assistance system has also helped doctors care for their patients.

"It really is a big step forward, compared to what was available before," said Frank, who practices in Rhonert Park, about 60 miles north of San Francisco. "What it's done is make it a lot easier for patients to access medications."

In the past, dealing with individual drug companies was "extremely cumbersome" for doctors, she added.

Supporters of legislation to allow drug imports said industry philanthropy will have little effect on prospects for passage, which they say are promising.

"The pharmaceutical industry does a lot of good things for people, but the fact remains they overcharge American consumers for prescriptions to the tune of billions of dollars a year," said Barry Piatt, a spokesman for Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND), co-author of the legislation. "There is no question there is support to pass this [importation] bill in the Senate, in the House and in the country."

July 27, 2005

THE NATION

Industry Hails Its Medicine Subsidies for Poor
Drug firms 'are getting it,' says a lobbyist, citing their program's aid to about 250,000 -- part of an effort to head off a prescription import bill.

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The pharmaceutical industry said Tuesday that a clearinghouse set up by drug companies had helped about a quarter of a million lower-income people obtain free or deeply discounted prescriptions in its first 100 days.

The giveaway program and the upcoming unveiling of self-imposed limits on pharmaceutical advertising are part of an industry effort to repair its image and head off legislation that would allow consumers to import low-cost prescription drugs from certain industrialized countries.

Drug companies "are getting it," W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, a former congressman who heads the main drug industry lobbying group, told a news conference. He also issued a progress report on the Partnership for Prescription Assistance, which helps people obtain free or low-cost medicines.

"You can't make products that extend human life ... without making sure those products are available to people who otherwise would not have access to them," said Tauzin, president of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

But supporters of the import bill said the industry's philanthropy would not slow the legislation, which recently cleared the Senate Commerce Committee, 14 to 8, and awaits action by the full Senate.

"The pharmaceutical industry does a lot of good things for people, but the fact remains they overcharge American consumers for prescriptions to the tune of billions of dollars a year," said Barry Piatt, a spokesman for Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.), co-author of the legislation.

With nearly half of all Americans taking at least one prescription medication, the cost of drugs has become a significant budget issue for families, employers and government programs. In Congress, a coalition of Democrats and populist Republicans hopes to overcome Bush administration objections and pass the import legislation this fall.

The prescription aid program is the industry's first attempt to coordinate access to more than 180 assistance efforts administered by drug companies. In the past, doctors typically had to apply for free medicine for their patients, but most physicians were not aware of all the programs.

The new industry effort simplifies the process, setting up a call center (1-888-477-2669) and a website (www.pparx.org) through which patients can find the program that covers their prescriptions and apply directly for benefits.

Patients with no prescription drug coverage and an income less than twice the federal poverty level are eligible for help. The income limit is $19,000 for an individual; for a family of three, it is $31,000.

About 600,000 people have contacted the clearinghouse since it was established in April. Of those, about 300,000 have completed the paperwork, and more than 240,000 are receiving medications, said H. Wesley Metheny, a vice president of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

Tauzin said drug companies provided more than $4 billion in free medications a year to 6 million patients who could not afford them, but that figure represented only about half of those who could be helped. The clearinghouse should help reach more people, he added.

Dr. Mary E. Frank, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, said the program had also helped doctors.

"It really is a big step forward, compared to what was available before," said Frank, who practices in Rohnert Park, about 50 miles north of San Francisco. "What it's done is make it a lot easier for patients to access medications."

Don't waste it

Monday, July 25, 2005

THE FLINT JOURNAL

Grabbing an early payout of tobacco settlement dollars might be prudent for Michigan, as long as Lansing politicians invest the money to create jobs and don't waste it on routine needs.

The latter is a distinct danger as the administration and lawmakers dicker over next year's budget, including an intriguing plan from Republican House members to raise up to $3 billion for economic development and other uses by selling the rights to future tobacco company payments.

That money, which all states share because of a 1999 legal deal, is like a lottery prize that should be nurtured into something larger and lasting. Unfortunately, budget and political considerations threaten to siphon away much of it for uses without a long-term payoff.

Of all of the bad ideas suggested, nothing is worse than a plan to put $500 million into the Medicaid Trust Fund -- a Band-Aid solution for an ailment requiring major surgery.

The underfunding of Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor, is a structural budget problem requiring a different and permanent fix, ideally with both federal and state participation. While hospitals and doctors could use this funding, it would leave Michigan no better off economically.

For that reason, we're also troubled by another GOP idea to set aside $1.5 billion for the Michigan Merit Award college scholarship program already funded with these tobacco dollars. While we initially supported the scholarships for qualifying high school students, that was at a time when government coffers were full and the state's economy was healthier. Though Michigan needs more college graduates, and the awards can play a role, this seems to be a huge diversion of a temporary windfall better spent investing in cutting-edge fields.

As it is, borrowing the tobacco money is an expensive way to raise cash. Critics predict it would yield only 40 cents on the dollar because of higher interest rates than those paid when simply bonding. Indeed, a $2-billion bonding program is what Gov. Jennifer Granholm had proposed for job-related investment, until tentatively accepting the Republicans' plan.

What's best about the tobacco proposal is voters wouldn't need to approve it. What makes us nervous is how the dollars would be spent. Free-market advocates argue governments are ill-equipped to make such economic choices even if politics can be minimized.

Regardless of that concern, Michigan just can't sit by while states such as California assemble pots of investment dollars to improve their economies. While low taxes and efficient government create part of the right climate for business growth, experience shows other lures are needed. Therefore, the proposed development fund is an essential tool.

Fortunately, Democrat Granholm and Republican legislators agree on this strategy and apparently are of one mind to tap the tobacco money to carry it out. But the spending details are all important. Proposals, no matter how noble, that wouldn't brighten Michigan's jobs picture would be best put aside.

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
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News Release

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Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends the Family Day Care Home Certificate of Registration of Rhondalee Sutherland

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July 27, 2005

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the license of Alcona County family day care home provider Rhondalee Sutherland, 4500 Sal, Greenbush, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the child day care family home.

The July 25, 2005, complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and/or day care family home promulgated rules requiring "emergency action" under the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, MCL 24.292(2).

Effective 6:00 p.m., July 26, 2005, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Rhondalee Sutherland from operating a family day care home at 4500 Sal, Greenbush, Michigan or at any other address or location. Accordingly, she may not accept children for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Sutherland to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her certificate of registration has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care.

Ms. Sutherland has held a certificate of registration to operate a family day care home since June 24, 2005. The certificate of registration was for six children.

Michigan law defines a day care family home "as a private home in which 1 but fewer than 7 minor children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption."

For more information, consult DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Assault suspect hit by pickup

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

By Kym Reinstadler The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- A Holland man who threatened suicide after allegedly assaulting his girlfriend with a hammer Tuesday morning was struck by a pickup 30 minutes later as he ran onto Int. 196 at Adams Street.

The 38-year-old man was taken to Spectrum Butterworth Campus in Grand Rapids with serious injuries but is expected to survive, Ottawa County Sheriff's Lt. Mark Bennett said.

Police are not confirming his identity until his release from the hospital and arraignment on felony assault charges, Bennett said.

Police began searching for him after he fled the scene of the alleged assault, a Holland Township apartment on 136th Avenue, north of James Street.

Officers spotted the man sitting on the railing of the Adams Street overpass. As police approached, the suspect fled down the embankment and onto the highway, where he was struck by a truck being driven by a 32-year-old Hamilton man, Bennett said.

The suspect was conscious but silent at the scene, Sgt. Bill DeWitt said.

The 10:40 a.m. incident snarled westbound traffic for nearly an hour.

The 22-year-old assault victim, whose name was not released, escaped the apartment and ran to a nearby business to seek help. She was treated at a local hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening.

A suicide note was found laying on the front seat of the suspect's car, an older model Mercury Marquis, which was parked with hazard lights flashing on the shoulder of the overpass.

Parts of the note were illegible. Other parts claimed the woman provoked the incident by throwing things at him and hitting him.

"She threatened to call the cops and say I raped her," the note said. "Never has anyone treated me this bad. I'm not going to jail for something that wasn't my doing."

Michigan Report

July 26, 2005

APPOINTMENTS BY THE GOVERNOR

EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT CORPORATION: Ismael Ahmed of Dearborn for a term expiring July 22, 2009; Susan Broman of Grand Rapids for a term expiring July 22, 2007; Deborah Dingell of Dearborn Heights for a term expiring July 22, 2009; Stephen Ewing of Franklin for a term expiring July 22, 2008; Pamela Faris of Clio for a term expiring July 22, 2008; Michael Flanagan of Lansing for a term expiring July 22, 2009; David Hollister of Lansing for a term expiring July 22, 2009; Robert Kelch of Ann Arbor for a term expiring July 22, 2007; Marvin McKinney of Haslett for a term expiring July 22, 2007; Hubert Price of Pontiac for a term expiring July 22, 2008; Gina Poma of Warren for a term expiring July 22, 2006; Lawrence Schweinhart of Ann Arbor for a term expiring July 22, 2008; Loise Stewart of Jackson for a term expiring July 22, 2006 and Sally Vaughn of Northville for a term expiring July 22, 2006.

IN BRIEF

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

Jackson Citizen Patriot

A Jackson resident is being named to the executive board of a state group that promotes early-childhood development in Michigan.

Louise Stewart was picked by Gov. Jennifer Granholm to a role with the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corp. Stewart chairs the local Head Start Policy Council and will serve until July 22, 2006. The public corporation sets guidelines for early-childhood activities that are enacted with the help of local intermediate school districts. The corporation is funded by public and private funds.

Proceedings stayed for teen who plotted terror

PUBLISHED: July 27, 2005

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Columbine-style rampage at Chippewa Valley High School are on hold following a stay this week by the Michigan Court of Appeals.
A trial date Tuesday for Marvin Osantowski, father of Andrew Paul Osantowski, was unexpectedly delayed by a last-minute decision to reschedule for Aug. 30, while court officials sort out what happens next in his son's case.
"I don't understand this because I'm not a co-defendant with my son, and his case has nothing to do with my case," said the elder Osantowski outside of court Tuesday.
Marvin Osantowski and his attorney, Robbie Lang, indicated they expected to go forward today either with trial proceedings or a resolution of some kind before the prosecutor's last-minute decision to seek a delay. They didn't elaborate on the resolution, and Lang declined to comment further.
Andrew Osantowski's appeal proceedings were brought by Macomb County prosecutors to determine whether the teen's comments to police could be used in other cases against him and maybe the case against his father.
A three-judge panel ordered Monday that "further circuit court proceedings in this matter only are stayed pending resolution of this appeal" and do not reflect on the other cases.
But county prosecutors said they are putting all Osantowski-related proceedings on hold as a precaution. Marvin's case could be impacted by the son's case since some of Andrew's disputed admissions implicate his father.
Osantowski, now 18, was sentenced last week to serve four years and six months to a maximum of 22 years for making a threat of terrorism, use of a computer to further a terrorist act, possession of stolen weapons and felony charges. He awaits trial in at least three other criminal cases preceding his Sept. 16, 2004, arrest. Macomb County Circuit Judge Matthew Switalski has ruled that the majority of a videotaped police interview in which Osantowski makes admissions regarding those crimes is inadmissible. Those other cases involved alleged break-ins and thefts that preceded the terrorism threat.
Macomb assistant prosecutor Richard Goodman, who was handling the

elder Osantowski's case, said he was expecting the case to take a different course before receiving notice from his superiors Tuesday morning to delay the matter.

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Ben Liston said the question of the admissibility of Andrew's comments is so important that all proceedings, including the father's trial on related charges, depend on getting an answer. He said the appeal could raise other questions as Court proceedings related to a convicted Clinton Township teen who had planned a well.

"We are going forward with the issue of the confession, but as long as the appeal is going forward we'd like to see if we can raise the sentencing issues as well," Liston said. "Or at least, we're considering introducing an appeal on the appropriateness of (state sentencing) guidelines and see if we can get a ruling on that as well."

Last month, while the terrorism trial was still pending, prosecutors filed an appeal challenging Switalski's ruling about the videotaped interview. Monday the court granted immediate consideration for that appeal, expedited the case and placed a stay on the lower court proceedings until the appeal can be heard. Prosecutors must file written briefs within 35 days, and the defense must respond within 21 days after that.

Brian Legghio, the defense attorney representing Andrew, could not be reached for comment Tuesday. In the past he has said the conviction would likely fail on appeal, and he plans to challenge the terrorism case.

Chat-room encounter man sought

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

THE SAGINAW NEWS

MILLINGTON -- Police are seeking a California man wanted on weapons charges who prompted complaints over an Internet chat-room meeting with a 14-year-old girl.

Jeremy Thomas, facing a Genesee County concealed weapons charge involving two ornamental knives in his backpack, was online at vampirefreaks.com when he started talking with the young girl, Millington police said.

Chief Steve Roggehntine said he found her on a computer in early July at a home in the Wood Valley trailer park in Vassar Township.

"She admitted she was talking to the guy on the computer," he said. "I haven't heard that she's had any further contact with this guy."

Thomas was online at a public terminal at the University of Michigan-Flint campus, where school police are now building a case from the virtual encounter, the chief said.

Roggehntine said Thomas was spotted in Vassar a couple days later, but hasn't been seen since.

"I think he was trying to locate the girl," he said. "We're basically watching the area to see if he shows up again."

Detroit News

Letters

July 26, 2005

Don't pass feel-good laws

So Jennifer Granholm thinks the way to deter sex offenders and child molesters is to simply set up 1,000-foot "predator-free zones" around schools ("State's sex abusers live near schools," May 26).

Based on that notion, let's declare my hometown or your hometown a "predator-free zone" or how about a "crime-free zone," so we can deter all crime? Only a naive mind would think such a concept would work. You don't have to be a criminologist or a psychologist to figure out that criminals (sex offenders and child molesters) don't follow the rules. Therefore, making more rules is futile.

Our politicians/government should quit with the feel-good politically-correct lawmaking and spend the money on police.

Nick Kensington
Canton

Man charged with swindling nearly $200,000 from senior citizen

7/27/2005, 5:57 a.m. ET

The Associated Press

WARREN, Mich. (AP) — A man accused of swindling nearly $200,000 from an 87-year-old woman he was supposed to be caring for faces a half-million dollar bond as he awaits trial.
Police and prosecutors said Pren Karaqi, 52, posed as a nurse in 2003 and sweet-talked the woman into letting him move in to take care of her, adding his name to her bank account and twice electronically transferring $42,000 to his brother's Swiss bank account, The Macomb Daily reported.
Prosecutors also said the woman bought Karaqi a $29,000 Jeep and persuaded her to leave him her house after she dies. They believe he swindled the woman out of nearly $200,000.
Judge Walter Jakubowski of the Macomb County 37th District Court set Karaqi's bond at $500,000 on Monday. He's charged with embezzling more than $20,000 from a vulnerable adult.
Officials said Karaqi provided companionship for the woman but no significant professional nursing care. A relative of the woman became suspicious and contacted a county social services agency, which then notified the Warren Police Department.
Karaqi was arrested July 3 by federal agents when he tried to enter the United States from Canada at the St. Croix River border crossing in Calais, Maine.
Karaqi, a native of Kosovo, waived extradition proceedings. A preliminary hearing in the case is scheduled for Aug. 4.

Information from: The Macomb Daily, http://www.macombdaily.com

Michigan Report

July 26, 2005

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENCY CALENDAR

The **Task Force on Elder Abuse** will meet Thursday, July 28 at 10 a.m. in State Police Training Academy, 7426 N. Canal, Lansing.

Editorial

Not So Bleak Houses

The New York Times

Published: July 27, 2005

Advocates for the homeless and New York City officials have been battling in court for 25 years - a figure that invariably calls up references to "Bleak House," the Charles Dickens novel about lives and hopes destroyed by an endless court fight. In the case of the city's shelter system, however, all that litigation has actually borne fruit. Although far from idyllic, things are much, much better than a quarter-century ago. Both the advocates and the Bloomberg administration deserve a great deal of credit.

But enough is enough.

Earlier this year, City Hall and advocates for the homeless were close to a settlement that would have ended court oversight of the system. But now both sides have retreated to their foxholes. It's time to get back to business. Ending court oversight is long overdue.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has demonstrated an impressive commitment to improving the shelter system, particularly the intake process. Simply getting into a city shelter was once a dirty and dangerous process: families with small children and homeless adults were thrown together in cramped, unsanitary conditions, sometimes for days on end. The new screening process is safer, faster and far more humane.

The city now has the data to oversee the shelter system - officials know far more than they once did about who is being served and where the beds are. Nonprofit groups work with landlords and families at risk to keep people from becoming homeless in the first place. Record numbers of families who have become homeless have been moved into permanent housing. This was accomplished by holding shelter providers more closely accountable for managing the cases of those needing housing.

The city has also held the shelter residents accountable for obeying the rules that require them to take affirmative steps toward self-sufficiency. The advocates challenged this initiative because it gave shelters the right to evict violators, and the advocates lost in the state's highest court. As is their right under the law, they continue to challenge individual eviction cases brought by the city against a handful of single residents of adult shelters who have caused problems.

The advocates argue that some of the shelter residents in question suffer mental illnesses and should not be held accountable for their actions. The city clearly needs to be careful in the eviction process. But the advocates need to read the writing on the wall. From now on, homeless New Yorkers will be pushed to take more responsibility for reclaiming their lives, and that is not at all a bad thing.

Lansing State Journal

Published July 27, 2005

Mid-Michigan, rest of nation salute Americans with Disabilities Act
15-year-old legislation changed lives, society

Staff and Wire Reports

The 15th anniversary of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act was celebrated locally and nationally on Tuesday.

The ADA made it unlawful to discriminate against qualified people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications.

The landmark law helped people with disabilities to be better at developing meaningful skills, engaging in productive work and leading independent lifestyles, said Valarie Barnum-Yarger, acting director of the Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council.

The ADA also has changed the way society views its citizens with disabilities, Barnum-Yarger said.

Chris Hilderbrant, the director of the New York-based Advocacy Center for Disability Rights, suffered a spinal cord injury 15 years ago, the year the ADA was enacted.

He said Tuesday progress has been made. "I think we've made a lot of physical accommodations more bathrooms places are more likely to provide an interpreter."

But he said now work has to be done to encourage more people with disabilities to join the work force.

Jul 27, 3:29 AM EDT

Soc. Security Revamps Disability Benefits

By MARY DALRYMPLE
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- People seeking disability benefits from Social Security can expect to spend less time waiting for a decision under changes rolled out Tuesday on the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Social Security Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart said people who are clearly disabled could be approved for benefits in as little as 20 days under the new procedures, which the agency expects to start putting into action next spring.

The rest of the roughly 2 million people who seek disability benefits each year can expect to spend less time working through the process for appealing decisions when benefits are denied.

"Everybody recognizes that there's a need for change and we need to improve the process," Barnhart said in an interview.

The Social Security disability insurance program pays cash assistance to people who cannot work for a year or more because of a disability. To qualify, an individual must have worked long enough, paid Social Security taxes and met the criteria for disability assistance.

More than 11 million people, including some family members of disabled workers, receive benefits.

Among the changes, the new procedures will screen applicants for cases of clear disability that can be quickly approved for benefits by a special unit.

For other applicants, the changes replace a step that sent cases back to a state agency for review if the state agency had denied a claim. Barnhart said that state review rarely overturned a decision and is considered a "rubber stamp" by many.

Under new procedures, the claim would be sent to federal reviewing officials, a standardized unit within the federal Social Security system.

Barnhart said the federal review means many applicants could get a more meaningful reconsideration of their claims more quickly.

The new process also establishes a unit of medical and vocational experts available to those evaluating disability applications at all stages of the process.

When designing the new system, the Social Security Administration determined that it could take an individual 1,153 days to move through the entire application and appeal process if the claim had been denied at each step.

Combining the new procedures with an electronic system that alleviates the need for Social Security officials to mail paper files around the country, Barnhart said that process should shrink about 25 percent.

The Social Security Administration plans to publish proposed regulations for public comment on Wednesday and issue final regulations by the end of the year. The administration expects it will take a couple years to implement the new system throughout the country.

Progress under ADA slows as law turns 15

Tuesday, July 26, 2005

By Sarah Kellogg Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- The Americans with Disabilities Act has opened doors for people with disabilities for the last 15 years, providing access to facilities and services that once were closed. But many advocates for the disabled say the act's early progress in protecting the rights of the disabled is being slowed as judges look to limit protections and narrow the definition of disability.

``When Congress passed the ADA, it was way ahead of many people in American society," said Andrew Imparato, president and chief executive officer of the American Association of People with Disabilities, a Washington-based advocacy group for the disabled. ``It was a revolutionary concept because it stated that when people with disabilities don't have equal opportunity, then that is discrimination. The courts have been reluctant to go there."

There were 37.5 million people at least age 5 and considered disabled in the United States due to a physical, mental or sensory impairment in 2003, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Michigan, there were 1.1 million disabled individuals.

Signed into law by President George Herbert Walker Bush in July 1990, the ADA was seen as groundbreaking legislation because it mandated that employment, public accommodations and government facilities be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The ADA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as working, hearing, speaking or caring for oneself. In addition, if a person has a history of an impairment or a perception of having an impairment, he can also be considered to have a disability

In the last 15 years, the ADA has been particularly effective in the area of public accommodations, forcing a number of changes in transportation, public facilities and communications.

Sidewalk curb cuts allowed for easier access for wheelchairs. Building construction included elevators and handicapped bathrooms. Closed captioning addressed the needs of the hearing impaired when viewing television or movies in theaters.

``The ADA really has given people with disabilities the opportunity to be fully integrated and to do all the things their neighbors have been doing for years whether they're going to theaters or ballparks or fishing piers," said Pat Cannon, Michigan's ADA administrator.

Where the ADA has failed most visibly is in employment, advocates say. Federal and state data show that the disabled are less likely to be employed and have lower incomes than average earners.

CONTINUED

Progress under ADA slows as law turns 15

About 42 percent of disabled men between 21 and 64 are employed compared with 34 percent of disabled women. Nationally about 66 percent of individuals between 21 and 64 are employed.
``For employment, the ADA has not been a real success at all," said Rachel Urquhart, executive director of the Arc of Kent County, which serves developmentally disabled individuals. ``Too much bad case law was made by people bringing wrong ADA claims, and they have watered down the strength of the act for the people who have true disabilities."
Business leaders agree, noting that they have fought lawsuits that would have expanded the definition of disability to include people with chronic illnesses or those with acute problems such as cancer.
But disability rights advocates believe fewer inroads have been made in employment because it is a much more complex area to monitor and police.
``Anybody can walk up to a door and measure whether it is 32 inches wide or not, and they'll know if someone is in compliance with the ADA," said Amy Maes, legal director for Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services, which provides services to the disabled.
``If a person applies for a job, it is much more difficult to tell whether they've been turned away because they have a disability, or not promoted because they have a disability."
The ADA's employment section remains one of its most controversial, because it requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for an applicant's or employee's known disability. It applies to companies with 15 or more employees.
The rub for some businesses has been that accommodating workers can sometimes mean pennies (rewriting employee handbooks or updating Web sites) or can sometimes translate into thousands of dollars in costs (adjusting desks to accommodate wheelchairs).
Still, many business leaders feel that the ADA has proven to be a boon because as they work to accommodate their workers, they often find themselves being more friendly to their disabled customers.
``From a business-community standpoint, our mantra is usually don't force regulatory things on us when we're already in tune to and have complied with these regulations," said Ann Parker, chief operating officer for the Small Business Association of Michigan, a Lansing-based business lobbying group.
``It does take something like the ADA to force you to think through all the issues, and sometimes they just don't relate to your employees. Sometimes they have to do with your customer base."

washingtonpost.com

In Defense Of Success
Government Really Can Lessen Poverty

By E. J. Dionne Jr.
Washington Post
Tuesday, July 19, 2005; A21

The problem with liberals, conservatives often say, is that they are too committed to old programs. This is an odd criticism coming from conservatives who regularly hail the low-tax, small-government policies of Calvin Coolidge as a model for good government. If wanting to bring back the 1920s isn't backward-looking, what is?

In fact, liberals suffer from a different problem: They rarely talk about what their programs have actually achieved. In the face of the attack on government since the 1970s, liberals have often fallen mute -- or pretended to be just as anti-government as their conservative rivals.

Alternatively, some on the left worry that saying certain things are working is a form of selling out because it distracts attention from all that is wrong. Ben Wattenberg and the late Richard Scammon cleverly parodied this approach more than three decades ago, when they wrote that liberals often seemed to declare: "Our programs have failed. Let us continue."

It is thus important news that today, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the estimable liberal organization, will release a series of studies showing that programs aimed at lifting up Americans with low incomes actually do what they say they do. The reports reflect a growing recognition on the part of progressives that after years of playing defense against conservative claims, it is time to go on offense.

The fact is that every year 27 million Americans are lifted from poverty by our system of public benefits. More than 80 million Americans receive health insurance through a government program -- Medicaid, Medicare or the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP. Without these programs, tens of millions would be unable to afford access to medical care. As the center notes, government programs reduce both the extent and the depth of poverty.

Does all this cost a fortune? Not by any fair reckoning. Federal spending on Medicaid and SCHIP represents 1.5 percent of gross domestic product. Federal financing for the rest of the low-income programs consumes just 2.3 percent of GDP. For a sense of comparison, consider that defense spending consumes 4 percent of GDP and interest on the national debt gobbles up 1.5 percent. President Bush's tax cuts -- which go in large part to the wealthiest Americans -- will consume roughly 2 percent of GDP.

And federal spending for the poor does a huge amount of good. Food stamps, the center notes, "help more than 25 million people with low incomes afford an

adequate diet." The school lunch and breakfast programs provide free and reduced-price meals to 22 million schoolchildren from low-income families. The supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children known as WIC helps about 8 million pregnant and postpartum women and their children under 5. One of its effects has been to reduce the incidence of low birth weight among infants. Think of WIC as one of our most important pro-life programs.

Or take the earned-income tax credit, which supplements the incomes of the working poor. Census data show that in 2002 the EITC "lifted 4.9 million people out of poverty, including 2.7 million children." Without the EITC, the center notes, "the poverty rate among children would have been nearly one-third higher."

The report cites conservative economist and Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker, who once wrote that the earned-income tax credit "rewards rather than penalizes poor families with working members." Yes, government programs can fight poverty while decreasing dependency.

Without government, our health care mess would be much worse. Just imagine how many more Americans would lack health coverage if 50 million of our fellow citizens -- many of them children -- did not have access to Medicaid.

There is much more in these reports -- available at http://www.cbpp.org/ -- but the point is clear: Without government's exertions, many more Americans would be poor. This, in turn, means that Congress's efforts to pay for the Bush tax cuts by trimming some of these programs, particularly food stamps and Medicaid, are, in a word, unconscionable.

In the 1980s President Ronald Reagan's budget director gave conservatives sensible marching orders. "We are interested in curtailing weak claims rather than weak clients," David Stockman declared. "We have to show that we are willing to attack powerful clients with weak claims."

Washington's silent scandal is that the weak claims of the best-off and the best-connected are getting far more deference than the needs of weak clients. When we know the good that federal spending for the poor can do, this silent scandal might begin to command a share of our attention.

postchat@aol.com

FLINT Supplies, funds sought for back-to-school drive

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Carriage Town Ministries is seeking basic school supplies and financial support to equip at least 300 needy kids for school this fall.

Through its 2005 "Klothes 4 Kids" campaign, Carriage Town, a nonprofit religious-based agency, provides students with vital school supplies, a new pair of shoes and two new outfits for school. Supplies include such items as notebooks, colored pencils, crayons and glue sticks, according to Bill Hobson, development director.

Supplies and donations can be sent to Carriage Town Ministries, 605 Garland St., Flint, MI 48502 with contributions also made online at www.carriagetown.org. Each student package is valued at about $75.