Department of Human Services

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Wednesday, December 28, 2005

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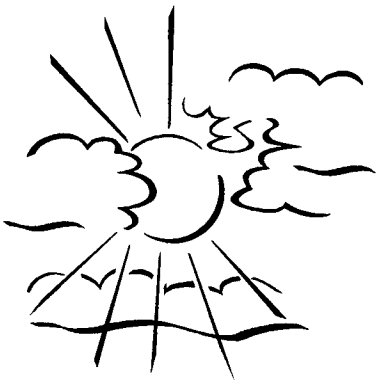

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Michigan

Granholm vetoes welfare package
House to vote this week on extension

December 28, 2005

BY DAWSON BELL and HUGH McDIARMID JR.
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Gov. Jennifer Granholm vetoed several bills Tuesday, including legislation that would have imposed a 4-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits in Michigan and a law designed to protect property owners from overzealous environmental regulators.

The veto of welfare reform sparked an immediate round of criticism from Republicans in the Legislature, who said Granholm reneged on a verbal pledge of support for time limits she made only a month ago.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, said the veto "sent a terrible signal to taxpayers," but nevertheless agreed to recall House members from their holiday recess to vote Thursday on an extension of current welfare policy through 2006.

In her veto message, Granholm said state government has a moral obligation to provide a social safety net, but that recipients should strive to work and learn their way out of poverty.

"This legislative package, however, goes too far," she said, and has the potential to cause real hardship for those with physical and mental disabilities, children in need or other insurmountable barriers to self-sufficiency.

"I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation or homelessness," Granholm said.

Backers of the legislation said the governor's objections were disingenuous.

State Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, one of the bill's chief authors, said the reforms would have moved more welfare recipients toward self-sufficiency by emphasizing job training and educational opportunities.

Lawmakers said sanctions written into the bills were aimed only at able-bodied adults who failed to meet work and school obligations.

Granholm's veto was applauded, however, by the Michigan Catholic Conference. Sister Monica Kostielney, conference president, said the legislation would have "sliced a major hole in Michigan's social safety net."

Also Tuesday, Granholm vetoed a law informally dubbed the homeowner fairness bill, saying it would have slowed economic development and threatened public health.

It was crafted by Midland-area legislators in the wake of controversy over the state's 2002 declaration that thousands of properties were likely contaminated by dioxin released by Dow Chemical Co.'s Midland headquarters.

The bill would have required that polluted properties be individually tested before they are declared part of a tainted site. Currently, regulators may selectively test sites to determine the scope of contamination.

The bill would have needlessly slowed cleanups and made them more costly, Granholm wrote in her veto message. It also would "provide polluters with inappropriate protections, allowing them to avoid responsibility for cleaning up environmental contamination."
The bill's sponsor, state Rep. John Moolenaar, R-Midland, blasted the veto, noting the legislation had bipartisan support and the endorsement of almost all local officials in the Midland region. "Not requiring testing leads to blanket designations ... that have devastated our local economy," Moolenaar said Tuesday.

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Wednesday, December 28, 2005

Granholm vetoes welfare changes
Governor says bills to restrict aid go 'too far'; House votes Thursday on extending current rules.

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Tuesday vetoed, as promised, a six-bill package designed to tighten rules for receiving welfare in Michigan.

The legislation "goes too far," the governor said, because it imposes a four-year lifetime limit on cash assistance, even for welfare recipients who fulfill work requirements but still don't earn enough money to escape poverty. The cutoff would have affected 157,000 children, she said.

"I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation and homelessness," Granholm said in her veto message, adding that she supports the four-year limit only for able-bodied people with no barriers to self-sufficiency.

She also said that while she backs strengthening sanctions against recipients who fail to comply with work and training rules, the penalties prescribed in the bills are too severe.

Lawmakers in the House will interrupt their holiday vacation Thursday to vote to temporarily extend the current welfare rules, which expire at the end of the year. The Senate already has approved the extension.

Republican lawmakers slammed Granholm for the vetoes.

"Michigan is the only state in the Midwest to offer lifetime welfare benefits -- a policy we simply cannot afford financially or socially," said House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi. Sister Monica Kostielney, who heads the Michigan Catholic Conference, said the legislation would have hurt the state's most vulnerable citizens.

"The welfare reform bills that were vetoed today would have sliced a major hole in Michigan's social safety net," she said.

Published December 28, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Governor rejects plan for welfare overhaul
Granholm vetoes new penalties for abusing system

By Amy F. Bailey
Associated Press

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Tuesday vetoed legislation that would have set a four-year limit on welfare, given recipients more time to get an education and created penalties for recipients who do not follow training and work requirements.

The veto means some provisions in the current welfare law expire on Saturday, but the state House is scheduled to meet on Thursday for a year-end session to take up a bill that would extend the current program for one year.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, criticized the vetoes and said the House will vote to extend provisions in the law set to expire. The Senate approved the extension earlier this month.

The vetoes "have put at risk assistance to those families who aren't trying to beat the system but instead play by the rules," DeRoche said. "The reforms would have provided new tools and training for those trapped in poverty so they could better prepare to find and keep a good job."

Without an extension, state Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow said the state would have to do more to determine which welfare recipients should be required to work.

Granholm said the legislation went too far. But she did sign two bills that will set timelines to develop individual plans to help move welfare recipients from cash assistance to self sufficiency and study the impact of other potential changes in the law.

State Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids, pushed for a lifetime limit to bring Michigan's welfare program more in line with other states.

Michigan is one of only four states that does not have a lifetime limit on welfare, Kooiman said.

Welfare reform

Highlights of the reform plan vetoed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm:

• Would have required recipients who could work to stop receiving cash assistance after four years.

• Would have allowed recipients with severe disabilities or those supporting a disabled family member to receive cash assistance longer than four years.

• Would have allowed recipients who are working to take home more of their income.

• Would have set up a three-strike policy for noncompliance.

Governor nixes welfare reform

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

By Nate Reens
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A new year will bring a renewed attempt to push welfare reform through the state Legislature, with sanctions and a lifetime limit remaining in the package, West Michigan lawmakers say.

State Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids, vowed Tuesday to continue efforts to tighten public assistance standards despite Gov. Jennifer Granholm's veto of a bill that would have set a four-year limit for welfare benefits and created penalties for recipients who fail to follow training and work requirements.

Granholm rejected the package, saying she supports limiting the amount of time welfare recipients can receive cash assistance, but proposals supported by Kooiman in the state House and Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, in the Senate, went too far.

"It's simply the last half of her waffle," Kooiman said, noting Granholm earlier suggested she would accept a 48-month benefit term.

"The only thing I can figure is that (special) interest groups got to her and got her to change her position.

"This is good public policy that is fair but firm and brings Michigan to the mainstream in terms of welfare programs in the country. We do need lifetime limits. We can argue and debate the exceptions, but it's something we need to have."

Granholm, in her veto letter to lawmakers, cited concerns of putting families in dire circumstances.

"I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation or homelessness," she said.

The House will meet Thursday to approve a one-year extension to current guidelines, Kooiman said. The Senate already approved the measure.

Ellen James, second vice president of the Grand Rapids NAACP, supports Granholm's veto of the bill. She and others recently criticized Kooiman and other legislators for moving the bill too quickly and without sufficient input.

"This is too important not to take enough time to explore the ramifications on the people affected," James said Tuesday. "I think there's a sincere effort to do something good, but it can't be put on a fast track and rushed."

Hardiman admits the package was on a quick timeline, with a majority of work done after October's budget haggling ended.

"There were satisfactory exemptions and safeguards to protect people who needed it while still breaking the cycle of dependency," Hardiman said. "Most people on welfare don't want to be there, and this would have put in a lot of support for people to get education and training."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

MICHIGAN REPORT NO. 247 VOLUME 44 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2005

GRANHOLM VETOES WELFARE BILL; HOUSE MEETS THURSDAY

Governor Jennifer Granholm, as she had promised, vetoed legislation that would have set a fixed time limit on welfare limits paid individuals, saying the legislation did not provide enough flexibility to provide protection to some and imposed sanctions which are far too strict.

In order to ensure that current welfare provisions remain in place past their Saturday expiration, House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) announced Tuesday the House would meet Thursday – part of the scheduled Sine Die session – to pass SB 757 and ensure at least a one-year extension of current requirements.

Mr. DeRoche denounced the governor's action, however, saying the vetoes send "a terrible signal to taxpayers and job providers." Even so, Mr. DeRoche said the Legislature will not leave current recipients in any jeopardy, so the chamber will meet at 11:30 a.m., Thursday.

Her action was criticized by other legislative Republicans, including Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) who said it would "keep Michigan as one of the weakest states in the nation when it comes to helping people become self-sufficient."

But Ms. Granholm said, "I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation or homelessness. This package is a far cry from being either pro-family, pro-child or even 'compassionately conservative.' "

And the head of the Michigan Catholic Conference, Sr. Monica Kostlielney said the legislation would have failed to help the poorest reach self-sufficiency. The bills vetoed would "have sliced a major hole in Michigan's social safety net."

Vetoed were SB 892, and SB 893, along with HB 5438, HB 5439, HB 5440 and HB 5441.

Ms. Granholm did sign two bills of the eight-bill package. SB 894, PA 323, which revises requirements for Work First recipients and HB 5442, PA 324, which requires the state to do a study on the effect increasing the amount of earned income disregarded for benefits would have on the state's welfare system.

The major premise of the package was to establish a 48-month lifetime limit on welfare benefits for able-bodied recipients. The package also had very strict penalties for individuals who violated the premise of their self-sufficiency plans, with three month

suspensions for the first two violations and a two-year suspension for the third violation. All the violations would count against the 48-month limit.

Ms. Granholm said those penalties are far "too extreme, especially at a time when our economy is already challenged."

Ms. Granholm said she would support a 48-month limit on the able-bodied, which she repeated in her veto letters, and a comment that drew alarms from the Catholic Conference and other organizations.

But Ms. Granholm later said her support for the lifetime limit was contingent on a person having no barriers to self-sufficiency. For persons who have educational or health limitations, or children, there needed to be some flexibility to keep those persons on benefits, she said.

Efforts to amend the legislation to keep that interpretation failed. And on Tuesday Republicans criticized Ms. Granholm for not setting a firm policy on the issue.

Mr. Sikkema said the legislation would have made the welfare system a tool for able-bodied adults to lead towards self-sufficiency while keeping a safety-net for the state's most vulnerable citizens.

Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) said he hoped an agreement can be worked out, but was disappointed at the vetoes, saying the legislation would have helped break "the cycle of dependency by focusing more on job training and educational opportunities."

And Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) said the Legislature had provided to "lift those in poverty out of Michigan's welfare trap and give the services they need while maintaining the accountability our taxpayers deserve. The veto of this life-changing legislation will only hurt residents of this state."

The last time a chamber met on action immediately prior to sine die was in 2002 when the Senate attempted and failed to pass legislation that would have allowed Detroit industrialist Bob Thompson to donate $200 million to create charter high schools.

MIRS
Tuesday, December 27

House To Return Thursday As Gov. Vetoes Welfare Reform

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** vetoed all but two of the eight welfare reform bills making the package ineffective since all eight bills were tie-barred together. The action led House Republicans to announce the chamber would vote Thursday to approve a Senate bill to prevent expiration of the state's existing welfare laws.

House Speaker Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Novi) said because Michigan's welfare law will expire on Dec. 31, 2005, the House will vote Thursday to extend the expiration date of key parts of the state's welfare laws so future debates over reform can continue. The House action will be a rubberstamp on a previously passed Senate bill (SB 0757) so the upper chamber will not need to meet.

"Governor Granholm has sent a terrible signal to taxpayers and job providers today by vetoing needed welfare reform," DeRoche said.

In her veto message, Granholm said she did support lifetime aid limits for able-bodied persons "with no barriers to self-sufficiency" but the legislation presented to her went too far.

Granholm did not like the 48-month lifetime welfare assistance limit on able-bodied persons because it was too narrow. She told Senate Democrats she would support the limit if it included provisions that would have given the Department of Human Services (DHS) authority to determine on a case-by-case basis if people needed to remain on welfare beyond the 48 months.

Republicans did not like this addition, claiming that it would make the 48-month limit pointless because technically no one would have to abide by the rule if the DHS thought the person needed to stay on welfare.

In her statement, Granholm said that some people, particularly families, need more time to get out of poverty and without the "very limited support" they receive from welfare, some families might not be able to pay rent or other basic necessities.

"I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation or homelessness," Granholm said. "This package is a far cry from being either pro-family, pro-child or even 'compassionately conservative.'"

Granholm also vetoed increased sanctions that would've been imposed on those who are supposed to work but don't. As passed by both chambers, the increased sanctions would have pushed a first and second time offender off welfare for three months and a third time offender off for two years.

"While I support strengthening sanctions for those who do not comply with work and training requirements, the penalties this legislative package would impose are too severe — 24 times too severe than penalties under current law," Granholm said.

Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood) saw the bills in his committee and made some changes to the package he thought would help them get bi-partisan support on the way to the Governor's desk. Hardiman said he is not pleased about the veto, but said he will continue to look for a compromise.

"It's disappointing to see the Governor veto legislation that would strengthen Michigan's welfare programs,

especially given her varying and vague positions on key parts of the proposal," Hardiman said. "These reforms would have helped break the cycle of dependency by focusing more on job training and educational opportunities. Our legislation would have targeted assistance to those remaining on welfare. I hope an agreement can be worked out next year."

Michigan Catholic Conference President and Chief Executive Officer Sister Monica **KOSTIELNEY** made the following statement about the veto.

"The welfare reform bills that were vetoed today would have sliced a major hole in Michigan's social safety net. Shifting the state's poorest residents toward self-sufficiency is an admirable goal, provided that proposed policies allow for preferential treatment of those whom the state is responsible to protect first and foremost. Unfortunately, measures passed by the legislature did not accomplish this objective."

In a purely symbolic gesture, Granholm signed the two least contentious bills, SB 0894, sponsored by Sen. Irma **CLARK-COLEMAN** (D-Detroit), and HB 5442, sponsored by Rep. Richard **BALL** (R-Bennington Twp.).

SB 0894 would have required welfare recipients to be assessed for literacy, skills, job readiness and mental or physical barriers or disability. Those needing help with any of the areas would have resources presented to them and further training.

HB 5442 would have increased the earned income "disregard" for welfare recipients who are employed at least 20 hours a week to earn $200 plus 50 percent of remaining earned income without having welfare benefits reduced. This bill would have increased the percentage from 20 to 50 percent. Since both bills were tie-barred to the vetoed bills, they will not go into effect.

At the end of her letter, Granholm urged the House to quickly approve SB 0757, sponsored by Sen. Shirley **JOHNSON** (R-Troy). SB 0757 is considered a fallback bill. It would extend the sunset on welfare rules for a year, giving the DHS at least one more year to work under the current rules and the Legislature and Governor more time to come up with an alternative.

Republicans sent Granholm the bills with the idea that without extending the sunset, the DHS couldn't sanction those who refuse to work and would be forced to make those who are exempt from working because of disabilities and other circumstances, work. They thought it would give her no choice but to sign the bills or tie the hands of the DHS.

The DHS recently said that even if SB 0757 isn't passed, the department would be able to issue sanctions against welfare recipients who refuse to work and keep those exempt from working exempt (See *MIRS*, "DHS Can Run Welfare Without New Laws," 12/21/05).

New report shows continued problems protecting vulnerable adults

12/28/2005, 12:50 p.m. ET
By AMY F. BAILEY The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Two years after state auditors told the agency charged with protecting vulnerable adults to beef up its investigations of abuse and neglect, a new report says some disabled and mentally ill people may still be at risk.

The report released Wednesday by the Office of the Auditor General was a follow up to find out whether Adult Protective Services took appropriate measures to enact three recommendations made in its 2003 audit. Auditors did their field work for the new report between May and August.

In the new report, auditors sampled 60 referrals of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation received by the agency. They said two of the 12 referrals that were denied should have been investigated.

Auditors, who reviewed 47 investigations, said agency workers did not always do a thorough review. As a result, they said vulnerable adults may have remained at risk in five of the cases they reviewed.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, which oversees the Adult Protective Services, did not have a comment on the report Wednesday morning.

The department updated its policy requiring Adult Protective Services workers to coordinate or provide needed services to vulnerable adults after auditors made the recommendation in 2003, but auditors said the new policies have not been effective.

A handful of 41 cases reviewed by auditors did not have a service plan or documentation to show that services had been coordinated and provided, the report said.

New rules could threaten small adult foster homes

Cheryl Wade, Midland Daily News 12/28/2005

Organizations that represent adult foster care homes and homes for the aged say proposed state rules now under draft could put some Mom and Pop homes out of business.

The coalition, made up of organizations that represent care providers or own homes, has been making the rounds of media outlets, saying the rules allow homes with unionized staffs to meet some state quality standards merely by having unions. Instead, the state should put more emphasis on outcomes and consumer satisfaction, they say. But a union official says having collective bargaining is one way to ensure workers at such homes are adequately paid and work in safe conditions.

"We haven't seen a standard like this in the history of our regulations," or for more than 30 years, said Kathleen Murphy, general counsel of the Michigan Assisted Living Association, a statewide trade group. She said at least 90 percent of staff working in licensed homes are not affiliated with a union.

"It's a highly independent workforce," she said. "I think it's working well the way it is."

But Nick Ciaramitaro, director of legislation and public policy for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, said there's a serious problem in this industry with workers who don't have adequate pay and benefits. That has meant much staff turnover.

"We in ... society pay people more money for flipping French fries than for taking care of our parents, grandparents or children," he said "Over 50 percent of the people working in the industry tend to work at least two jobs, often three, amounting to 40 to 60 hours (a week)" and half of workers are eligible for Medicaid, food stamps or both.

Ciaramitaro said the rules should require that for a home to be licensed or certified and to accept residents, it should demonstrate the ability to attract and retain "sufficient and trained staff." Having a collective bargaining agreement should be evidence that employees are paid sufficiently, he said.

Gail Ronquist, who owns an AFC home in Williams Township and one in the Upper Peninsula, said she doesn't believe she needs a union to ensure decent working conditions. She pays $7 an hour or a salary of $1,200 a month for a job she called "glorified baby-sitting" because her residents can take basic care of themselves or else Ronquist calls in a hospice caregiver. Mothers who work at her homes may take their children to work.

The coalition has other problems with the proposed rules. Homes would be required to have health and safety and safe staff committees that would meet regularly and have minutes and accompanying paperwork. Murphy said the committees are arduous and don't allow for flexibility.

Another proposed change would affect the way homes track data, said Deborah Pettyplace of Central State Community Services, which operates group homes. Homes keep a set of data that includes such information as incident reports. The state visits the home and inspects the data. But the new draft would have homes put the data into a computer database linked to the state, and she believes the extra work would be burdensome or even ridiculous.

With only so much money to go around, "how do you increase staff to do the administrative work?" asked Linda Lawther of the Michigan Center for Assisted Living, another statewide trade group.

Sara Kindy, who operates a local 10-person licensed AFC home, said she knows little about the rules but said operators like herself have enough paperwork to do as it is.

"If a home can't afford a computer, the state shouldn't enforce it," she said.

Ronquist said she believes requiring reports to be on a database interferes with residents' privacy.

Jury finds Cline guilty on all counts

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune 12/23/2005

BAD AXE Deliberating for about 23 minutes, the jury in the Stephen Cline case returned Thursday just after noon with a guilty verdict.

The jury found Cline, 43, guilty of kidnapping/secretly confining his then-wife, Linda Cline, 47, of Pigeon. Jurors also found him guilty on each of the 17 counts of first-degree abuse of a vulnerable adult (Linda Cline, who is blind and diabetic). The two have since divorced.

The very word "guilty" read by the jury's foreman immediately caused the victim to sob as she sat in the courtroom surrounded by friends. When the foreman concluded, Circuit Court Judge M. Richard Knoblock set Cline's sentencing for 1:30 p.m. Feb. 13. Cline was escorted back to his jail cell.

When charges against Cline were filed early this summer it sent shock waves through not only Linda Cline's home community of Pigeon, but through the state. It even led to creation of a state anti-torture bill which is expected to be signed by the governor in early 2006.

Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner said Thursday he's pleased with the jury's verdict, and he credited three things to the prosecution's success.

"First, the courageousness of the victim; second, the dedication of Pigeon Police Officer Colleen Emerick who pursued every possible fact in the case; and third, the preparedness of prosecution team," he said. "Justice has been achieved. It has been a long eight months, but we got justice in the end.

"There wasn't a day that we haven't spent some amount of time on this case. It has always been in the forefront of our thoughts."

Gaertner and Chief Assistant Prosecutor Stephen J. Allen struggled early on with the Cline case when it came to their office. Outraged over the facts of the case, they tried to find just where the case fit in the judicial system. In Michigan it is a crime to torture an animal, but there is no law on the books outlawing the torture of a human being.

Before the jury began deliberations Thursday, Cline's attorney Douglas Lee reminded jurors his client is not charged with torturing Linda Cline. Lee said he's charged with abuse of a vulnerable adult, and argued Linda Cline is not that since she cared for herself in the beginning of their relationship while she was living alone and working successfully for Northwest Airlines.

"If Mr. Cline was charged with torture we probably wouldn't be here today," said Lee who described viewing the videotape segments of Linda Cline bound and suffocating as "awful." But he told the jury he felt the prosecutors did not prove when the video was recorded — an element they failed to fulfill.

"I can't think of a single witness they called, seven of them, that said Mr. Cline gave her (Linda Cline) the wrong amount of insulin," said Lee in closing.

The jury ruled otherwise, and Lee did not want to comment on the verdict as he was leaving the courtroom.

Prosecutors alleged throughout the case that Stephen Cline, when injecting his wife with insulin as he often did, altered her dosage which caused her unconscious state and allowed him to hog-tie her, and suffocate her with a plastic bag — without her knowing exactly what was going on.

The investigation into allegations of abuse of Linda Cline began after a family member (of Linda Cline) made a complaint to Pigeon Police Officer Colleen Emerick in the spring of this year.

Emerick began investigating the allegation of abuse, and discovered Cline was wanted in Wayne County on an unrelated warrant. She went to the Cline residence April 14 to arrest Stephen Cline.

After Cline was arrested at the apartment, Emerick said she stayed behind to question Linda Cline about bruising on her arms. Linda Cline told the court she had no idea at the time what was going on. After the police left the apartment Linda Cline testified she discovered items laying around their apartment, like ropes, a digital camera and the clothes she was wearing folded up in the living room underneath a blanket. And that's when the discoveries were made that ultimately led to the charges and conviction of Stephen Cline.

Early on in the case Huron County prosecutors were given the go-ahead from the state's Attorney General's Office allowing them to try Cline in Huron County for any incidents which occurred at locations not only in Huron County, but throughout the state of Michigan.

At the time of sentencing on Feb. 13 Cline faces up to life in prison on the kidnapping charge. Each of the 17 charges of abuse of a vulnerable adult carry a possible sentence of up to 15 years in prison.

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Jurors view videotape in second day of Cline trial

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune 12/22/2005

BAD AXE — As the Cline jury trial got under way for the second full day in Huron County Circuit Court Wednesday, the prosecution presented the most compelling evidence yet — a videotape seized by Pigeon Police Officer Colleen Emerick during her investigation that led to charging a 43-year-old Pigeon man with 18 felony counts.

Stephen Cline, the defendant in the case, faces one count of kidnaping/confining his blind and diabetic wife Linda Cline, and 17 additional counts of abusing her. They have since divorced.

Wednesday morning testimony began with Emerick taking the stand and revealing item after item seized from Stephen and Linda Cline's apartment in Pigeon earlier this year.

When it came time for the jury to view the video, Cline and his attorney Douglas Lee sat near the television, as they whispered back and forth to each other. Lee appeared to be concentrating on the jurors' reactions.

The video was graphic and long, as segment after segment revealed Linda Cline's hands and feet bound, a clear plastic bag secured over her head as she gasps for breath.

At times in the video she can be heard screaming out "Stephen ... Stephen ... Stephen."

The jury appeared to be disturbed while watching the video which also shows Linda Cline's body still and no longer gasping for air. Emerick told the jury in those segments Linda Cline had stopped breathing.

While the video was played for the jury, Emerick remained on the witness stand narrating to the jury the length of each segment, how Linda Cline is dressed up in lingerie and high heals, whether or not Stephen Cline appears in the segment and exactly how long Linda Cline has stop breathing for.

Aside from the video presented to the jury, Huron County Assistant Prosecutor Stephen J. Allen also presented lingerie, high heals, plastic bags, a digital camera, video camera, ropes, hand cuffs, and photographs of Linda Cline dressed in lingerie as she is bound as evidence. All were seized from the Cline apartment during the investigation or given to Emerick by Linda Cline.

Lee objected to the video's admission as evidence in the case due to the fact that Emerick had no knowledge of when or exactly where the video was recorded as the backdrop for the video segments changes. Emerick did tell jurors that in a few of the segments a brass bed in several scenes was used by the couple only after they were married in September of 2002.

Huron County Circuit Court Judge M. Richard Knoblock said "there's enough evidence tying the video to things found in the apartment," as he allowed the admission of the videotape.

Also testifying Wednesday was Detective/Sgt. Ron Roberts of the Huron County Sheriff's Department. He interviewed Stephen Cline for the first time on May 11 after he was arrested in mid-April at his Pigeon apartment by Emerick on an unrelated charge out of Wayne County.

Roberts said his interview with Stephen Cline took place in the Wayne County Jail. At that time Stephen Cline was willing to speak with him about the investigation into possible abuse against his wife, Linda.

"We talked about the couple's dating, marriage, relationship and sex life," said Roberts about their first interview.

"Mr. Cline said in their married life they were having trouble and he had thought of leaving or divorcing her," Roberts said.

When asked about what Cline said regarding his sex life, Roberts told the jury Cline told him "he enjoyed his sex life with her and described their sex life as 'different.'" Roberts went on to tell the jury that Cline said "he enjoyed experimenting."

He said he "tried to tie her up, she tried to tie him up," Roberts said. "It wasn't satisfactory to either of them and discontinued.'"

Roberts said Cline told him during the interview that he was licensed in 1984 or '85 in Indiana as a paramedic. Cline said he was familiar with giving injections.

"He didn't appear to be surprised that I was there investigating the matter," Roberts said.

As the questioning turned to the videotape, Roberts said, "I asked if he's ever put a plastic bag over Linda Cline's head and "he (Stephen Cline) said 'You've viewed the tape haven't you?'"

Roberts said their conversation continued about tying Linda Cline up and taping the acts. Roberts testified that Stephen Cline told him over the span of two years he tied Linda Cline up and put a bag over her head 12 different times but stopped six months before the date he was interviewed by Roberts.

"He would tie her ankles, her wrists," Roberts said. "He said that type of activity caused him to be sexually aroused."

Robert testified that Cline told him he would put a bag around her head and secure it with a rubber band or fold the bag so when she raised her head the bag would become loose and she could breath more freely. Only on one occasion did Cline tell Roberts that he put a plastic bag over Linda Cline's head after she asked him not to.

"He said he 'did it anyway.'" Roberts said. "He said she gave him permission to do this. He said of the 12 times he did this only four or five times it caused her to go unconscious. He said he was vigilant to make sure not to cause her death."

Roberts said he asked if Cline was concerned about causing Linda Cline brain damage with the loss of oxygen.

"He said he was aware and it wasn't a concern it would happen to her." During the interview Roberts said Stephen Cline "described himself as a sicko who needed help."

During an interview at a later date Roberts said he continued questioning Cline about the incidents.

"I told him I felt he put her at the brink of death," Roberts said. "He said he felt it was under control, that nothing like death was going to take place." Also called to testify was a cell mate of Cline's while he's been lodged in the Huron County Jail, along with Linda Cline's long-time friend Patricia Anderson of Pigeon. She told the jury she's known Linda Cline since they were in school but had noticed her slurred speech for the first time in February and became concerned.

Anderson was only on the witness stand for a short time before Dr. Helen Scoblic, who specialized in treating diabetes, took the stand. She told the jury she examined Linda Cline's medical records but did not examine Linda Cline in person.

Scoblic testified that Linda Cline is in fact a Type 1 diabetic and that if she was given too much insulin that her sugar level would plummet and could as a result lead to a seizure, or cause Linda Cline to become unconscious. Scoblic also viewed the same videotape the jury watched. She said she didn't know the woman in the video with a plastic bag over her head as she watched 19 different scenes.

"She's being tortured basically," said Scoblic, also testifying it appeared to her the woman in the video is not conscious of what is going on.

"I think her consciousness was altered by insulin or some other drug," said Scoblic who told the jury that there was 1 hour 25 minutes that Linda Cline was deprived of oxygen in the segments she viewed which would cause her to lose brain cells that would not regenerate and could cause her slurred or halting speech.

"I don't know how she could be the same person she was before because of the brain damage," Scoblic said.

Testimony ended on Wednesday with the prosecution resting its case. The trial is under way today with the defense presenting its case to the jury.

Stephen Cline remains lodged in the Huron County Jail. If convicted o[illegible]ious charge of kidnapping/confining Linda Cline, he faces life in prison.

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‘Senior specialists’ may not be special

The Huron Daily Tribune 12/27/2005

Region VII Area Agency on Aging, which includes the Thumb, in conjunction with the Michigan Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS) and the North American Securities Administrators Association (NASAA), issues this message of caution applies to investors of all ages, but with particular emphasis to those aged 55 and over.

According to recent reports, securities regulators have opened 26 cases in the past year involving individuals claiming to be senior investing specialist, when in fact, they are not properly licensed by state securities regulators. Older investors are a top target for con artists. The files of state securities agencies are filled with tragic examples of investors who have been cheated out of savings, windfall insurance payments, and even the equity in their own homes. According to the NASAA website, seniors should be especially caution if the salesperson makes the following claims:

• “I just got a hot tip from an inside source that this stock will go through the roof.”

• “Your return is guaranteed. There’s no way you can lose money.”

• “Gotta get in one the ground floor now or you’ll be left out in the cold. In fact, we’ll send a messenger over tomorrow to pick up your check.”

• This deal is so great, I invested in it myself.”

• “If this doesn’t perform as I just said, we’ll refund your money no question asked.”

• “Everyone else that invested in this did very well.”

OFIS Commissioner Linda Watters said, “Bogus senior specialist commonly target senior investors through seminars where the specialist reviews seniors’ assets, including securities portfolios and typically recommends liquidating securities positions and using the proceeds to purchase indexed or variable annuities products or other investments the bogus specialist offers.”

In Michigan, individuals who sell securities or provide investment advice are required to earn a license by passing rigorous examinations before they can offer their services to the public.

Because senior citizens have built up a lifetime of savings, seniors continue to face investment fraud by con artist peddling unsecured promissory notes and other investments that are either fraudulent or unsuitable for them based on their particular financial needs. Before doing business with any investment professional, all investors, especially senior investors, should check their state securities regulator to determine whether the individual is properly licensed and if there have been any complaints or

disciplinary problems. In Michigan, residents should contact OFIS by email or toll-free by phone at 1-877-999-6442 for this information.

The OFIS website is www.michigan.gov/ofis and the NASAA website is www.nasaa.org.

Feel free to contact Region VII Area Agency on Aging regarding this or other senior related issues at 1-800-858-1637, or visit the website at www.region7aaa.org.

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Boy, 13, faces court in robbery case

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer 12/28/05

A victim in a November armed robbery testified Tuesday he never saw the face of the suspect until after Battle Creek police apprehended a 13-year-old boy.

Trevor Bannister, 16, of Battle Creek told a judge that he identified Kevin Demott by his clothes and the color of his hair, but not by his face.

Demott is charged with four counts of armed robbery and will be tried as an adult after being arrested following the Nov. 17 robbery of Little Caesars Pizza at 629 Capital Ave. S.W.

Testimony came during Demott's preliminary examination before Probate Judge Gary Reed, sitting as a circuit court family court judge.

Bannister said he and a cousin and friend were waiting for their pizza order when a person entered the store.

"A man or a young kid came in and told us to get on the ground," Bannister said. "He had a gun and he pointed it at us. It looked pretty real."

Bannister said employees of the business were hiding and when the robber demanded money, Bannister said he didn't have any but his cousin put $2 in change and his friend his wallet into a stocking cap given to them by the robber.

But when the robber realized the employees were hiding, he left the business without taking the money.

"He called out to the employees but I told the robber the employees left and he ran out the door," Bannister told Assistant Prosecutor Mike Lind.

During questioning by Defense Attorney J. Thomas Schaeffer, Bannister said the robber was wearing a ski mask and he didn't see his face.

But after police caught Demott running a few blocks from the store, Bannister said he and the other two victims were taken to see Demott.

"I identified the hair color and the jeans and the shoes," Bannister said.

Robby Patton, store manager at the time of the robbery, said he saw the robber enter the store and dove for the ground. While he couldn't identify the suspect, he said he believed he was armed with a gun.

Police said they did not recover a gun. Demott later confessed to the robbery but said he was carrying a toy gun, police said after the robbery.

The hearing will resume Jan. 5. Demott is being held in the county juvenile home.

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

Life without parole for young offenders is costly

Ann Arbor News

To the editor

December 28, 2005

I am grateful to your editors (The News, Nov. 8) for sharing their thoughts on an important opportunity available to the citizens and Legislature of Michigan, the opportunity that we as citizens, working through our legislators, have to eliminate the costly and unforgiving practice of sentencing child offenders to life in prison without possibility of parole.

Whatever Sen. Alan Cropsey's reservations may be, there is no reason why he should refuse to let this proposed bill out of committee and gives his fellow legislators a chance to vote on it. Perhaps he is failing to focus on an important fact: Passage of this bill will not let anyone out of prison. It will give some young men and women - many of whom have been in prison for longer than they have lived free - a chance to try to convince a parole board that they have worked, studied, learned and grown up into mature, responsible, rehabilitated adults.

Since 1996 in Michigan, child offenders between the ages of 14 and 17 charged with homicide offenses are automatically treated as adults. Neither the judge nor the jury has any say in sentencing these youngsters. Even youngsters who never pulled a trigger or held a knife can be - and many are - sentenced to prison for the rest of their natural lives.

I would also urge Sen. Cropsey to carefully consider his fiduciary responsibility in this matter. Prison time costs Michigan taxpayers $10 million a year of badly needed state resources. By ending mandatory life-without-parole sentences, we can use some of the money we save to build educational and support services that may help stop crime in a more positive way.

Alvia G. Golden, Ann Arbor

Traverse City man arraigned for domestic violence

Cadillac News 12/28/05

CADILLAC - A 47-year-old Traverse City man was arraigned in 84th District Court in Cadillac on a charge of domestic violence Monday.

Kenneth Allan Aprill was in court stemming from an incident where he allegedly did assault Victoria Miller on or about Dec. 25. This was a third time charged with a similar offense. In addition to the domestic violence charge, he also was charged with habitual offender, second offense.

The domestic assault charge is a two year felony and/or $2,500 fine and the habitual offender has a penalty of one and one-half times the maximum sentence on the primary offense.

He was appointed a lawyer and was given a $5,000 cash/surety bond. He also is to have no alcohol, daily PBT tests and no contact with the victim. His pre-trial was set for Jan. 4.

Also in 28th District Court Monday:

€ Robert Brian Wilson of Cadillac was arraigned on one charge in district court Monday.

The 28-year-old was charged with telephone-tapping-cutting lines on or about Dec. 24 in Cadillac where he allegedly did cut or make a connection with a telegraph or telephone line, wire or cable. It is a two year misdemeanor and/or $1,000 fine.

Mr. Watson was appointed an attorney and was given a $10,000 cash or surety bond.

Pre-trial was set for Jan. 4

Wife beaters, husband hitters: Roscommon is coming for you

Bay City Times

Thursday, December 22, 2005

It's not OK to slap your old lady around.
Or your old man or kids, for that matter.
That's the bottom line in an effort to stamp out an epidemic of domestic violence in Roscommon County.
Using a two-year federal grant, the state Attorney General's Office has appointed a special prosecutor to pursue these hard-to-convict people who beat up their families and housemates.
The problem is that it's hard to get children to testify against parents, and abused mates often recant their tales of beatings.
In Roscommon County, the special focus on domestic violence is needed. The number of such cases there is twice the number in Ogemaw and Arenac counties combined.
The special prosecutor says she aims to get at the root causes of domestic violence, and not just treat the symptoms by locking up assailants.
That approach is encouraging.
Roscommon officials had discussed for several years how to treat this domestic disease that can wreck families and scar children for life.
This special effort to catch abusers, jail them, and hopefully help them ought to send a message, loud and clear.
You do not slap your family around.
Ever.

Alternative health plan offered

Gladwin County Record

December 28, 2005

GLADWIN COUNTY – Adult residents in Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon counties now have another option for health care coverage. The Central Health Plan is a community sponsored health benefit program for adults between the ages of 19 and 63 years of age who meet the income guidelines and do not have any other health care coverage. Adults who are currently enrolled in a Medicaid spend-down program may also be eligible for the Central Health Plan. For example, if an adult makes $14,355 or less a year and does not have any children, he/she could qualify for this program.

This health benefit program pays for primary care physician and specialist visits, outpatient laboratory and radiology procedures, certain prescriptions and urgent care visits. Enrollees in the program pay between a $5 and $20 co-payment for the services described above.

For more information, or to fill out an application, please contact your local Central Michigan District Health Department Branch Office in Gladwin County at 989-426-9431

Should aging inmates be freed?

Medical care saps Mich. prisons

Number of inmates older than 60 has jumped 62 percent in six years

Francis X. Donnelly / The Detroit News
December 28, 2005

COLDWATER -- The elderly grandfather can't do much with his right arm or leg.

Withered by a heart attack and stroke, John Richmond has trouble walking and getting out of bed. Once considered dangerous, he's sometimes overwhelmed by chairs that won't release him from their clutches.

Old cons like Richmond, 73, sentenced up to 30 years at Lakeland Correctional Facility, are quickly becoming the face of prisons in Michigan and the United States. The number of inmates older than 60 has jumped 62 percent in six years.

Their medical costs are eating up an already strapped Michigan budget, preventing the state from spending on schools and other needs. Health care for Michigan prisoners has jumped 50 percent in six years, from $120 million to $181 million.

But the financial hemorrhaging is avoidable, say criminologists. They said many geriatric jailbirds can be released from prison without posing a threat to society.

Jonathan Turley, a law professor at George Washington University who has worked with elderly prisoners, said study after study has shown that age is the best criteria to determine whether parolees will return to crime.

A federal Justice Department report found in 1990 that 2 percent of men paroled after age 55 return to prison. For men ages 18-24, the figure was 22 percent.

"You're facing a serious crisis," Turley said. "Most states will hit a demographic wall, and they're not prepared."

Despite the soaring costs of locking up the elderly, the state has little inclination to release them.

And victims' advocates said convicted felons like Richmond, who sexually assaulted a woman in 1990, don't deserve a single day of freedom.

"If they did something horrendous to my family, I wouldn't want them out," said Gail Beasley, who began a Detroit bereavement group in 1989 after her brother was murdered. "They have to be accountable for their actions."

Richmond, a retired Air Force flight engineer with a white buzz cut, was sentenced to eight to 30 years. He became eligible for parole in 1998 but has been turned down every year.

And so he spends most of his time in his dormitory-like room, sleeping and watching soap operas on his black-and-white TV. He takes a dozen medications and shuffles about with a walker.

"There is nothing I could do to hurt someone," he said.

But few people were listening.

'It's the same as dying'

The geriatric unit at Lakeland Correctional offers a glimpse into the future of Michigan prisons.

It looks like an old folks' home surrounded by uniformed guards and concertina wire.

It has rooms instead of cells, beds instead of bunks, ramps instead of steps. The doors have automatic-opening buttons, and the showers have seats. Handrails snake around the florescent-lit hallways.

The H-shaped unit, which has medical facilities in the middle, has 96 male prisoners who were assigned there because of poor health. The most seriously ill are held at a prison hospital in Jackson.

The unit sits inside the larger prison, a former mental health facility surrounded by a barren, frozen landscape evocative of the community's name.

It doesn't feel like prison so much as a hospice, said inmate Al Albertson.

"It's the same as dying," he said. "It's capital punishment in a non-capital-punishment state."

Albertson, 74, who has been locked up 40 years for killing a bar owner, was whisked by ambulance from the facility in May after a heart attack.

As Albertson spoke last week, he stood outside a rec room where a man was playing solitaire and another assembling a thousand-piece puzzle. A stationary bike went unused.

Each week, the unit has bingo, wheelchair aerobics and handicraft classes, where men knit and crochet. Lines for medication form at 8 a.m., noon, and 4-8 p.m. When inmate Eli Rossell looks in the mirror, he sees a stranger who is wrinkled and plain worn out.

Aches and pains make it difficult for the onetime college football player to move about. Visitors stopped coming a long time ago.

"I know my life is over," he said. "My family and friends are either dead or so old they're not the people I used to know."

Rossell, 82, who has served 34 years for killing a woman, found the geriatric unit so gloomy and death-scented that he moved back into the more dangerous larger prison several years ago.

"Most people talked as if they had one foot in the grave," he said.

Tough parole board

The Michigan Parole Board became one of the toughest in the nation during the 1990s, said criminologists.

Then-Gov. John Engler pushed for members who took a dim view of rehabilitation.

In 1992, the board required inmates with life sentences to serve 15 years before becoming eligible for parole and to wait five years for each subsequent review.

In 1998, the state passed a law requiring inmates to serve at least their minimum sentences.

Neither Gov. Jennifer Granholm or Corrections Director Pat Caruso, who appoints the parole board, has shown much interest in softening Engler's stance.
"I expect the parole board to be tough," Caruso said. "That's their job."
"They're responsible to a wide range of groups, from taxpayers to the public, the community, the victims, the prisoners they consider for parole, all of us."
Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland have released elderly inmates through a program founded by Turley, the law professor. Law school students cull inmates' records to find the best candidates for release based on age, crime, behavior in prison and other factors. The students then argue the cases in front of the parole board. They've won the release of 100 inmates, and none has returned to prison.
In Michigan, the state's toughness with inmates comes with a price.
The number of Michigan prisoners older than 60 has risen from 960 in 1999 to 1,557 this year. The overall population increased 11 percent during that time.
Inmates over age 50 account for 13 percent of the prison population.
At the geriatric unit, the oldest inmate is 85. Some have been in prison since the Korean War.
It's a bald battalion armed with bifocals and hearing aides, propelled by a battery of canes and walkers. So many residents wield wheelchairs that few chairs are necessary in the cafeteria.
Wobbly fingers prevent the buttoning of shirts. Some, baby-like, need to have their food chopped up. They're helped by younger prisoners who work as aides.
"It leaves a lot of stroke victims dealing with shoestrings and buttons," said Doc McBee, 68, who has served 35 years for murder.
Financial costs soar
Inmate Joe Bennett has the face of an aging leprechaun but, unlike the mischievous elves of Irish folklore, his capture didn't net anyone a crock of gold. Instead, it's costing the state one.
He takes 10 medications twice a day for arthritis, a hernia, poor breathing, swollen legs and high blood pressure.
The annual cost of jailing an elderly inmate is three times higher than a younger one, $69,000 vs. $22,000, according to the National Center of Institutions and Alternatives, a Baltimore group that studies alternatives to prison. If the inmates were released, they could be eligible for Medicare or Medicaid, transferring the financial responsibility from the state to the federal government.
Bennett, 79, who is serving up to 40 years for sexually abusing a girl, keeps his legs elevated by sticking books and clothes under his mattress. Until, that is, he has to urinate, half a dozen times a night.
"What good can come of holding an 80-year-old in prison?" he asked. "Most aren't able to tie our own shoes."
It's not just an old con's lament. His ailments aren't the most expensive for the state to treat.
The prison's health roll call would challenge any nursing home's: diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, amputations, HIV, Parkinson's, hepatitis C, Lou Gehrig's disease, kidney and liver failure.
"Our ailments?" said inmate George Hall. "Pick a card."
Hall, 70, once worked at the geriatric unit as an aide. Now he's a resident.
Like most of the inmates, he dreams of walking away from prison one day. He imagines living in a simple house in the country, being able to fetch cold milk from his refrigerator in the middle of the night.
But Hall knows the odds are against him. The convicted murderer, who has been in prison for 30 years, was passed over for parole last year. His next chance is 2009.
"Longevity 101 will tell you I can't do many of those," he said on his birthday.
Hall said he no longer poses a threat to anyone, but that's not why he's still in prison, serving a slow death sentence.
"The real reason is punishment," he said. "Only my death will pay the debt. Society wants my life and nothing is going to change that."
You can reach Francis X. Donnelly at (313) 223-4186 or fdonnelly@detnews.com.

December 28, 2005

Traverse City Record Eagle

Letters to the Editor

Bias in court systems

There is an obvious bias in our court systems, especially in northern Michigan. If you are a non-custodial parent, you, in the court's eyes, are basically dirt. This is the case with Friend of the Court ("friend of the custodial parent") and the family court.

Both parents may be equal in their parenting skills and have the same amount of love for their children, but the mother is almost always awarded custody, while the father is treated like a nobody - except when it comes to child support.

The courts set ridiculous amounts of support to be sent to the custodial parent, who, in turn, is not accountable for how that money is spent. I've heard on too many occasions things like, "She can't go to the bar tonight, because she didn't get her child support." How pathetic.

If you become a "non-custodial" parent, many of your rights are taken away. You don't see or talk to your children every day, although the custodial parent's new lover can. Is that just?

Vote wisely at the state level and locally, and keep letting your children know how much you love them. They are the ones most hurt by all this.

Todd Elliott
Traverse City

Published December 28, 2005

Not 'lewd': Cohabitation measure from 1838 has no relevance in these times

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The Michigan Legislature has been derelict and slothful in not repealing an 1838 state law that prohibits "lewd and lascivious cohabitation."

The new year should bring a new diligence from lawmakers in expunging this and other archaic and detrimental measures. Sadly, a Michigan family has been dragged through a legal gantlet due to lawmakers' inattention.

At issue are the living arrangements of Ferndale's Christian Muller when his two children, ages 5 and 7, visit. Muller has joint custody of the children with his former wife, Nicolette Muller.

Mr. Muller now has a live-in girlfriend, a matter his ex-wife contested legally. A trial court ruled Mr. Muller's arrangements violated the 1838 law and, therefore, were a matter for the courts. The trial court ordered Mr. Muller not to have overnight guests of the opposite sex when his children were staying overnight - and imposed the same restriction on Ms. Muller.

This month, the Michigan Court of Appeals upheld those actions, making a point to state: "The social policy of the state of Michigan is established by the Legislature, not the courts, and we note that MCL 750.335 prohibits lewd and lascivious cohabitation."

We're pretty sure the Legislature in 1838 didn't corner the market on family wisdom. And we're certain the current Legislature can't claim such prescience.

Cohabitation is part of Michigan's social fabric; it is not - in and of itself - evidence of "lewd or lascivious" behavior.

When couples with children divorce, they bring the courts into their families. And those courts have the legal duty to protect a child's best interests; we have a state law that says so.

So, if state courts find specific, demonstrable actions detrimental to children, they can and should issue orders. But the very fact that a man and woman live together, by itself, is not a matter for the courts or the state.

Repeal this archaic law.

Food banks feel the pinch Donations down while demand is expected to rise

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Packed inside each box were food items such as corn flakes, baked beans and peanut butter and household goods like liquid detergent and toilet paper.
The boxes were labeled according to family size.
"How many people are in your family?" asked Detective Sgt. Ken Rochell, founder and president of Christian Law Enforcement Fellowship, the group responsible for collecting the food donations.
"We have toys over here," Trooper Lee Victorian said pointing over by a wall. "Would you like wrapping paper to wrap it in?"
Aldridge, a 24-year-old Ypsilanti resident, said she had just gotten a job and the extra food will help her and her two young children out during the holidays.
"It's nice that people are willing to help others," Aldridge said before selecting a toy. "With the holidays and the way things have been with the economy, it's hard not just for people without jobs, it's hard for people with jobs, too."
Those who run nonprofit organizations, including food banks, would agree.
Directors and workers in these groups say food drives and other charitable giving have lagged this holiday season, mostly because many people had donated to the hurricane disaster relief efforts in the Gulf Coast.
The shortage comes as those associated with local and national food banks say they are bracing for an increase in food requests this winter because of the economy, unemployment and rising energy costs.
Rochell said Christian Law Enforcement Fellowship expects to serve between 30 and 50 families with food, turkeys, toys and gift certificates, even though food donations are down.
"This year has been lower than previous years, but I think part of it is because of the economy and everything that's happened with Hurricane Katrina," Rochell said. "But we're still trying to do everything we can do to get people to contribute to meet those in need in our community."
The State Police office was also filled with food donations in November, when the Ypsilanti post took part in the Michigan Harvest Gathering campaign, a major fundraiser for the nonprofit Food Bank Council of Michigan.
According to Jane Marshall, executive director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, children and elderly people make up more than 50 percent of the people who receive food from food banks.
The campaign raised $4.6 million and 7.1 million pounds of food from private corporations, local businesses, farmers and private citizens that will be given to food banks that serve all 83 counties of Michigan.
Locally, a major campaign of Food Gatherers, Washtenaw County's primary distributor of food, fell seven tons short of its 107-ton goal. Food Gatherers held its annual "Rockin' for the Hungry" event Dec. 7-11.

There are still a couple of weeks to catch up, said Eileen Spring, executive director of the food bank and food rescue program.

"It's not that people haven't given, because they have," Spring said. "But I think it's donor fatigue because overall, food drives have been behind. Our warehouse is emptier than it's ever been for this time of year."

Food Gatherers takes food to more than 150 local community programs that serve mostly families and children. The agency's five vehicles and volunteers transport an average of more than 3.4 tons of rescued food per day, according to Food Gatherers' statistics.

Spring also said it's costing more to rescue and deliver the food because of rising gasoline prices. "The more food rescue we do, the more it costs us," Spring said. "We want to be in a position to do more but the operating costs of being on the road is challenging."

Food Gatherers is among the 200 food banks and food rescue organizations in a national network based in Chicago called America's Second Harvest - The Nation's Food Bank Network. The network is the largest charitable hunger-relief organization in the country.

America's Second Harvest President Robert Forney predicts that higher heating costs this winter will force people to choose between buying food or paying their heating bills. He expects more people to seek emergency food assistance this winter, which is why donations from the public, in both food and money, are important.

A youth group at Ann Arbor Church of Christ raises money for its food giveaway program well before the holidays come around. During University of Michigan home football games, the young people park fans' cars in the church lot at 2500 S. Main St., near Ann Arbor-Saline Road, for a $10 donation.

This year, $8,000 was raised through the football parking program, said Michael Boyd, who with his wife, Kerry, coordinates the church's community outreach projects.

The youth group was able to buy enough Thanksgiving food to serve 55 families whose names were given to the church by the state Department of Human Services' Washtenaw County office, Boyd said. The families came to the church to "shop," choosing the turkey and the food they wanted for their Thanksgiving meal. For Christmas, food and presents were delivered directly to the group's five "adopted" families.

"It's faith in action," said Boyd, a Saline resident who teaches youth Bible classes at the church. "It's not just talking about things, but doing things."

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6810.

EDITORIAL

Battle Creek Enquirer

Helping fight hunger earns special tax break

If you're like most Americans, hunger is far from your mind as we celebrate the holiday season with plenty of food and other festivities. But there are families in our community who aren't sure where they will get their next meal.

If you are contemplating year-end charitable donations, you can help those hungry families and get a special tax break by giving a donation to the Food Bank of South Central Michigan by Dec. 31.

Since 1992, Michigan has offered a special tax credit to individuals, married couples, businesses and others who contribute to a qualified hunger nonprofit organization. You can receive a state tax credit for up to half the amount you donate to the Food Bank of South Central Michigan. Married couples, for example, are eligible to receive up to a $200 tax credit on a $400 contribution. Single individuals may receive up to a $100 tax credit on a gift of $200. Businesses also are eligible for a credit under the state's Single Business Tax.

According to Bob Randels, executive director of the Food Bank, the need is especially great this year.

"Thousands of individuals have joined the ranks of the unemployed, uninsured and working poor," Randels said. "We need to be there for them."

The Food Bank works with 250 nonprofit member agencies to help feed families in Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Hillsdale, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Lenawee and St. Joseph counties. Approximately 39 percent of those served are children, and 13 percent are senior citizens.

For more than two decades the Food Bank has provided millions of pounds of food to agencies that serve families in need. But the Food Bank can't meet that need without the support of the community.

The local food industry and other corporations have been exceptional in their support of the Food Bank, but the contributions of individuals also are vital to maintaining operations.

Contributions postmarked by Dec. 31 will be eligible for the credit on 2005 Michigan taxes.

Contributions to the Food Bank may be mailed to Food Bank of SCM, P.O. Box 408, Battle Creek, MI 49016, or they can be made online at www.foodbankofscm.org. For more information about donating to the Food Bank and the Michigan tax credit, call the Food Bank at 964-3663.

Originally published December 27, 2005

Volunteer of the month named

Gladwin County Record

December 28, 2005

GLADWIN – As a resident of Antler Arms, John Frazier as been managing the Food Commodity Program Distribution through Mid Michigan Community Action Agency for the last seven years along with his wife, Caroline and other residents as his assistants.

Frazier can always be counted on to keep things running smoothly and keep the center updated on those who have moved, passed away, or who are new and could possibly use the commodity program.

Frazier also constructed a coupon board which is hanging in the MMCAA lobby so that people can come in and take advantage of the coupons available. He has been writing, editing and delivering the newsletter "Did You Hear" to the residents of Antler Arms for the last four years.

Frazier has been involved in many activities including organizing the Mystery Meal, participating in the Activity Committee, and delivering Meals on Wheels to residents of Antler Arms. Every spring Frazier paints the outside benches and picnic table and if other repairs are needed he is there to help with those as well.

Frazier is also the Tenant Council Representative for the second floor of Antler Arms. Frazier has become known as “Mr. Fix It” to the tenants of Antler Arms.

In his "spare" time Frazier enjoys bowling, fishing and riding his bike.

Michigan Report

December 28, 2005

LOCAL UNEMPLOYMENT SPIKES IN NOVEMBER

Michigan experienced another hike in local unemployment rates this month, but officials say that was expected as the tourism industry slows down in November. Every region of the state reported a rise in unemployment since October.

Meanwhile the overall rate now stands at 6.2 percent statewide compared to 7 percent last year.

The most dramatic changes in unemployment numbers were primarily in the northern regions of the state. The regions hit hardest were; Bay City area (21 percent rise, with the unemployment rate going from 5.1 percent in October to 5.9 percent), Northeast Lower Michigan (36.4 percent rise, going from 5.4 percent to 7.4 percent), Northwest Lower Michigan (29 percent rise, going from 4.7 to 6.1) and the Upper Peninsula (33 percent rise, going from 4.5 percent to 6 percent).

The Detroit, Warren and Livonia unemployment rate reached 6.8 percent in November compared to 6 percent in October, a 14.5 percent unemployment increase.

The remainder of the state also experienced about a 15 percent rise in the unemployment rate since October. However, retail, government, health service and education, or payroll jobs, have increased statewide in the same time period.

A measure of county employment rates found similar patterns. All 83 counties experienced a hike in unemployment since October, but jobless rates declined in 81 counties since November 2004.

A county assessment of unemployment rates found Washtenaw (3.8 percent), Isabella (4.1percent), Menominee (4.3 percent) and Cass (4.3 percent) counties leading the state with the lowest jobless rates. Mackinaw (12.2 percent), Keweenaw (11.9 percent), Oscoda (9.6 percent), Montmorency (9.5 percent) and Lake (9.5 percent) have the highest unemployment numbers. The state's largest county, Wayne, had an 8.1 unemployment rate this past month.

Compared to unemployment figures in November 2004, this year Michigan is employing more people in all 17 regions. But, payroll jobs, like retail and manufacturing have declined in the past year, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growthtraining and.

Saginaw jobless rate still below '04 level

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

SCOTT DAVIS
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw County's unemployment rate rose in November but still remains far below the same period last year, the state Department of Labor and Economic Growth has announced.
At 6.8 percent, the November jobless rate was up 0.8 percentage point from the previous month, the agency reported.
Nevertheless, the community's economy showed continued strength compared to its unemployment rate of
8.1 percent in November 2004.
"It looks like more people in Saginaw County are working," said Jason S. Palmer, economic analyst with the state agency. "That's been the trend through the end of this year."
The county's unemployment rate remained above the state average of
6.2 percent -- which rose by 0.9 percentage point since October. Compared to November 2004, last month's unemployment is down 0.8 percentage point.
Eleven of 12 regional labor force markets in mid-Michigan experienced labor force expansion in November, ranging as high as 1.8 percent in Shiawassee County. The employment rate rose in Shiawassee, Midland and Tuscola counties but declined in the remaining nine labor force markets in the region.
The Saginaw area saw relatively flat payrolls in November, with 93,200 jobs in the county. The only industries adding positions last month were retail trade (300 jobs) and construction (100).
By contrast, manufacturing experienced a loss of 400 jobs, leisure and hospital dropped by 200, and professional/ business services and educational/health services both dipped by 100.
Palmer said the figures reflect an ongoing shift in the county from manufacturing positions to more service-oriented jobs.
Over the past year, total jobs are down by 2,300, or 2.4 percent.

Vehicle donations plummet in 2005
Tax law changes confuse would-be donors

Catherine Jun / The Detroit News/ 12/28/05

Kent Potvin bought his family a green Chevy Malibu eight Christmases ago, after the transmission blew on their Chevy Corsica.
With more than 100,000 miles on the odometer, the Malibu is worn, and its gas gauge is broken. Rather than sell it, the family donated it last weekto a local charity, Charity Motors,to claim it as a tax write-off.
"It's not a bad little car -- I figured maybe they could do something with it," said Potvin, 45, of Walled Lake.
Fewer people in southeast Michigan are following the Potvins' example at the end of the tax year, which usually is the busy season for car donations, as people try to qualify for last-minute deductions.
At nonprofit Charity Motors, vehicle donations are down 25 percent for the year. Even in November and December -- a time when charities usually get a big boost -- donations are down 20 percent from last year. Motor City Blight Busters, a nonprofit civic improvement group, reports its car donations are off 90 percent from last year. Blight Busters got fewer than a dozen cars in the last three months.
Charities blame tax law changes, and confusion about the changes, for the dearth of donations. As of Jan. 1, 2005, donors no longer could deduct a vehicle's market value -- usually the figure cited in the Kelley Blue Book. Taxpayers could deduct only the amount for which the used vehicle was resold -- a figure that usually is much lower. In June, however, the Treasury Department granted an exception: donors who give vehicles to charities that resell donated cars to the poor can still claim the Blue Book deduction.
As a result, donors are "shopping around" for the fair market value tax deduction, said Bill Brazier, executive director of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
"The donor stipulates that they want (their car) to be used to help with transportation needs to the poor," Brazier said.
By picking Charity Motors, Potvin will be able to deduct $1,500. If he'd given the car to a charity that sold it to a dealer or to the general public, his deduction would have been limited to the amount for which the car was sold.
"I had heard advertisements and went online to find out if that's the case," Potvin said.
Last week, the IRS announced a further clarification: It will not accept fair market deductions on donated vehicles if they are resold at an auction -- even if the charity claims a needy person bought it.
In response, Volunteers of America Michigan will send revised receipts and letters of explanation next week to several hundred donors who originally were told they would be able to deduct the fair market value on their car donation this year.
"We're going to have to tell some donors the bad news," said Bob Brandsen, manager of Volunteers of America Michigan.
The IRS issued the clarification after discovering "questionable practices" by charities that auctioned donated cars to needy people at prices that were not significantly below the fair market

value. No Michigan charity has been cited for improper car donation practices, said Stephen Moore, spokesman for IRS Criminal Investigation.

The latest clarification, however, may not be clear at all to potential donors who already are reluctant to give away their vehicles. Charities may also be unsure of what the announcement means for them.

"Lots of people are still confused," said Charity Motors spokesman Rick Frazier."The law is vague in a lot of areas."

Donors to the nonprofit, one of the few that qualifies its donors for the fair market deduction, can still deduct the fair market value -- even those sold through its own in-house auctions, said Frazier, who believes the clarification only applies to charities that use third-party auction houses.

You can reach Catherine Jun at (734) 462-2204 or cjun@detnews.com.

Car donation write-off

If you are claiming a donation deduction amount more than the amount it fetched on resale, make sure the vehicle was not sold at auction. Contact the charity or look at your 1098-C from the charity.

Bikers help battle child abuse

12/28 20 155

By Alyson Ward
KRT News Service

It's barely past noon, but already there's a surly-looking pack of motorcycles parked outside Hot Rods and Hoggs in Arlington, Texas. And inside, the biker bar is swarming with the men and women who ride them.

There are at least 30 of these folks. They have boots and tattoos, leather vests and don't-mess-with-me expressions. On those vests are their nicknames: Panther. Nasty. Gambler. If the club's bartenders were on duty — and if sunlight weren't streaming through the windows — this would look like the beginning of a great Friday-night party.

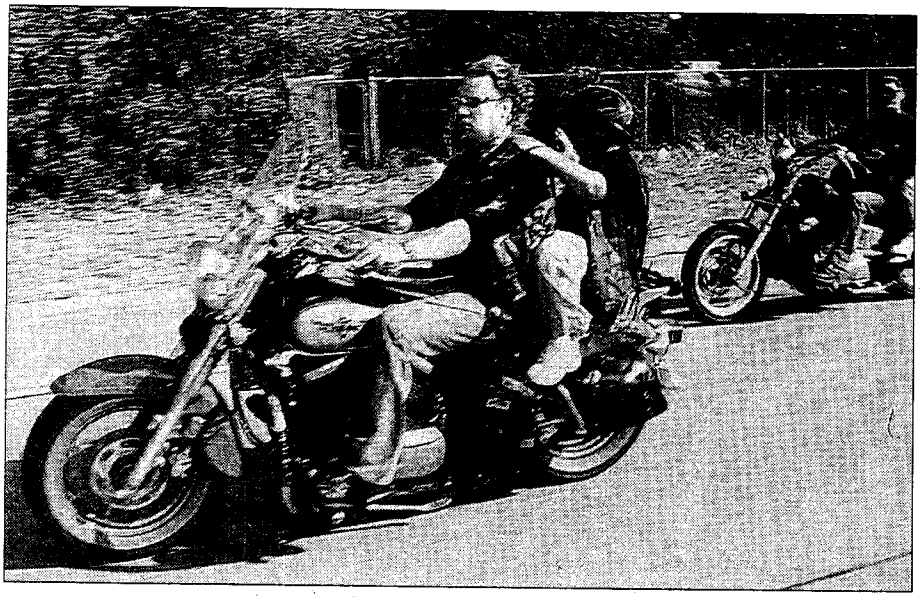
But the bikers are here on business. On their vests are pins and patches that say "Keepers of the Children" and "No Child Should Live in Fear." And they're on their way to meet and "adopt" an 8-year-old boy who saw his little brother being molested.

"I brought his vest, I brought his certificate, I brought him a bear," a guy known as Axe-Man tells the ragtag crowd, holding up a teddy bear.

The bikers get directions. They talk through their plans. Then they head for their motorcycles. Someone yells, "Let's go make a life better!" And with an earth-shaking roar, a parade of Yamahas, Hondas and Harleys rumbles onto the highway.

The leather-clad crowd is a group called Bikers Against Child Abuse. Known as BACA for short, the national group was started 10 years ago by a social worker with a motorcycle and a plan.

John Paul Lilly — known as "Chief" among those on two wheels — led a group of biker friends in Provo, Utah, to stage an "adoption" ceremony in 1995 for an 8-year-old victim of abuse. The point? To make the kid feel empowered, knowing he had a family of burly, brave bikers who would befriend and protect him.



Road to recovery: Axel "Axe-Man" De Groote (left) takes the Bikers Against Child Abuse Fort Worth chapter's newly "adopted" child out for a ride in Arlington, Texas.

KRT News Service

On the Web

▸ **www.bacausa.com:** The Web site for Bikers Against Child Abuse.

Now BACA has more than 60 active chapters spread across 22 states. They are attorneys, teachers, truck drivers and real estate agents most of the time. But they'll devote days, nights and weekends to making young victims of abuse feel safe and loved.

Axe-Man, the Fort Worth, Texas, chapter president, is Axel De Groote, a tall man with a scraggly red beard, a Vulcan Classic and a career as a computer programmer.

He doesn't look like a computer programmer. When he's wearing his leather vest, with his hair gathered into a ponytail, he looks more like somebody you might avoid at a 7-Eleven. But with his solemn earnestness, De Groote embodies the image that BACA hopes to present: the tough guy with the heart of gold.

"We may look like a rough bunch, but the kids see beneath our exterior — they see where our heart is," he says.

The bikers work with advocacy agencies to find kids who have been abused. With the parents' permission, they'll "adopt" a kid in a loud, proud ceremony, then follow up with friendship and protection as long as it's needed.

They're tender with children, intimidating to those who abuse. They'll sit in court with their leather vests on and lend confidence to kids who have to testify. They'll talk and play with their adoptees, offering a sympathetic ear or a trip to the skating rink. And if a child is threatened or pursued by an abuser, the members of BACA will go as far as surrounding the child's house to guard it 24/7, sleeping in shifts and escorting the child to school.

De Groote says the group is diligently nonviolent, more interested in helping kids than in punishing their abusers.

"We don't even care about the perpetrator," he says. "We're strictly child-focused."

BACA's mission statement reflects the slightly contradictory policy of intimidation without violence: "We do not condone the use of violence or physical force in any manner," it says. "However, if circumstances arise such that we are the only obstacle preventing a child from further abuse, we stand ready to be that obstacle."

Dan Leal remembers a time when BACA became an obstacle.

Leal is the executive director of the Children's Advocacy Center for Denton County, Texas, which refers 75 to 80 kids to BACA each year. He remembers an accused abuser who would follow his victim's bus home from school every day, waving at the child to intimidate him, "to let (the child) know he was still around."

Then BACA got involved.

"One day, that perpetrator was following that child home with the school bus," Leal says, "and all of a sudden (he) heard the roar of motorcycles in the background." BACA members pulled up next to his truck. Then they swarmed around him to block his access to the school bus. The next afternoon, when the guy came back, so did BACA. It didn't take long before he "got the message and backed off," Leal says.

Former H&R Block manager volunteers to help file taxes

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

By Shannon Maynard
For the Citizen Patriot

After leaving the accounting field to start his own business, Jerry Hatton realized his passion for numbers wouldn't be easy to leave behind.
So when the Community Action Agency began looking for volunteers to assist with tax preparation, Hatton saw it as an opportunity to lend a hand.
"I had been out of it for 10 years," he said. "I thought I'd help out and I fell back in love with it."
Three years ago, the Jackson District Library and the CAA joined together to create Volunteers in Tax Assistance. The program is designed to help low-income, elderly and handicapped individuals with their tax preparation and e-filing.
Hatton, 59, of Spring Arbor had spent 12 years as a district manager at H&R Block. That experience gave him the knowledge he needed to coordinate the program.
"I've got this skill and I can use it to help (the clients) with something they really can't afford to do," he said.
"There's a need and nobody else with my unique set of skills."
As the program coordinator, Hatton recruits, trains and supports volunteers.
The first year the program helped 185 clients file their taxes. Last spring, about 30 volunteers worked with 930 clients.
Hatton has found his work with the CAA to be rewarding.
"I love helping people. It gives me a sense of satisfaction. I take a lot of pride that we're doing (their taxes) correctly," he said. "Anyone who has a skill that can be used should use it to help people who are less fortunate."
In addition to serving with the CAA, Hatton has volunteered with the American Red Cross and serves through Concord United Methodist Church. He also owns Best Books in Jackson Crossing.
Hatton and his wife, Mary Ellen, have been married for 37 years. The couple have two children and are expecting a third grandchild in March.

Ann Arbor News

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

Ann Arbor News

Donate old cell phone

If Santa brought you a new cell phone and it's time to recycle your old one, Verizon Wireless stores collect old phones and related equipment like headsets to refurbish and donate to its HopeLine program. HopeLine proceeds go todomestic violence prevention, awareness and education. Any area retailer should have more information.