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TOPIC	PAGE
Children's Rights	2-4
Licensing	5-8
Adoption	9-13
Child Support	14-15
Seniors	16-17
Community Support/Funding	18-20
DHS Press Releases	21-22

Everything Michigan

Talks stall in suit against Mich. foster care system

5/28/2008, 6:37 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Settlement talks have broken down again in a federal class-action lawsuit against Michigan's foster care system.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds in Detroit set trial for July 7 after negotiators reached an impasse Wednesday.

This is the second time negotiations have stopped. They ended last year when the Michigan Department of Human Services said it had no money to enact reforms. Talks resumed earlier this year.

If the state loses the suit, it could cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. The state is responsible for about 19,000 abused and neglected children.

Children's Rights, a New York-based child advocacy nonprofit group, sued the state in 2006 on the behalf of thousands of children in state custody.

A court-ordered study has shown the foster care system is riddled with failures, one so understaffed that children are not getting routine medical and dental exams.

Marcia Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, said a lot of progress was made during the latest talks but an issue was raised two weeks ago that could not be resolved. She declined to give specifics, citing the confidentiality of settlement discussions.

"We're full-speed ahead in trial preparation," Lowry said.

DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said in a statement that the agency will mount a vigorous defense in court. She said the department will accelerate changes already under way — hiring more child welfare workers, licensing foster parents who are relatives of abused or neglected children and creating a task force to help improve the system.

Both sides have wanted to avoid a trial but also have prepared in case an agreement cannot be reached.

Two dozen DHS managers and supervisors spent hours giving depositions in the fall. And Children's Rights earlier this year made public two scathing reports by expert witnesses it will use at trial.

One expert who reviewed the deaths of five foster children concluded that abused and neglected children are far too likely to be no safer in foster care.

The state dismissed the findings as one-sided and promised its own reports.

The state hired 200 more foster care workers this budget year and boosted rates paid to private agencies that care for abused, neglected or delinquent children.

Outside experts worry the moves will not be enough at trial.

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By DAVID EGGERT

Associated Press Writer

5:37 PM CDT, May 28, 2008

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WORK & FAMILY
By SUE SHELLENBARGER

Checking Up: States' Reports On Child-Care Centers Hit Web

Some important government child-care safety records are entering the Internet age at last.

In the past, state regulators' inspections of child-care centers and homes for safety, quality and cleanliness typically were cloaked in bureaucratic obscurity. To see the records, parents often had to drive to a state office during the workday or file cumbersome written requests under state freedom-of-information laws.

Now, 20 of the 50 states have begun posting the records online, and at least 13 more plan to do so soon. Searches usually can be done by Zip Code, city or facility name, bringing up state inspection reports, safety

state links.)

Getty Images

South Carolina's online reports enabled Melissa Starker to steer clear of a questionable child-care center for her infant son. Ms. Starker was considering four centers recommended by her friends as she prepared to return to work after maternity leave. All seemed like good prospects.

But when the Greenville, S.C., mother logged on to check them out, she was dismayed to see that at one of the centers, state regulators had found 13 rule violations for unsanitary practices, poorly qualified teachers and improper supervision of children. That was "a big red flag for me," she says.

Parents should also visit and observe centers, question providers and interview references, of course. The Web sites are only as rigorous as the underlying regulation. The frequency of inspections is very low in some states, says the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, a nonprofit group. For child-care centers, it ranges from quarterly to every three years, says Linda Smith, executive director. For family child-care homes, where one or two people care for a small group of kids, inspections are done as infrequently as once

a decade.

RESOURCES

• Links to the state regulators' Web sites available **here**.

MAILBOX

• Columnist Sue Shellenbarger **answers readers' questions**[1] about setting limits for teens, telecommuting, and resources for at-home moms looking for skilled project work.

The postings encompass only licensed facilities. In most states, that omits the smallest family child-care providers -- typically, those that care for fewer than five children in a home. Some of the online information is sparse, forcing parents to call inspectors for details. And interpreting the data can require some judgment; infractions cited can range from failing to post a meal menu or spacing coat hooks too closely to hitting children or leaving them unattended in a car. Child-care operators have asked the states to refrain from publishing unsubstantiated complaints, to include providers' responses and to distinguish major infractions from minor ones.

Nevertheless, the postings at least enable parents to know what state regulators know. In Tulsa, Okla., last year, a toddler suffocated at a family child-care home after the caregiver, Vicki Chiles, bound his hands and mouth with masking tape to keep him quiet during naptime, she later admitted. Ms. Chiles's operation had been investigated numerous times by state regulators for such offenses as hitting a child repeatedly with a fly swatter and leaving children unattended in a van. Regulators were taking steps to close the facility.

But regulatory records in Oklahoma were difficult for parents to access at the time. The toddler's parents couldn't be reached, but they told reporters after the incident that if they had known about Ms. Chiles's regulatory problems, they would have withdrawn their son. Ms. Chiles was found guilty of murder. Oklahoma now posts some records online and plans to expand disclosure further.

A new generation of Web-savvy parents has been pushing for such information. A Michigan official says one staffer was "totally buried" in written child-care inquiries before it posted data online. Angie's List, a clearinghouse of service ratings, began posting child-care reviews in December 2006 "because our members wanted it," a spokeswoman says.

Casting a spotlight on regulation tends to improve quality. Inspectors produce more reports and issue fewer blanket approvals when their reports are posted online, says a 2004 study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research. "We're seeing providers looking at how other providers are doing" and comparing their programs, says Leslie Knachel, a Virginia licensing official.

• Email sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com[2].

State Web Sites

Links to state regulators' Web sites for child-care safety, quality and health information:

Arizona[3]

Arkansas[4]

Colorado [5]
Florida[6]
Georgia[7]
Indiana[8]
Michigan[9]
Nebraska[10]
New Hampshire[11]
New York State[12]
New York City[13]
North Carolina[14]
North Dakota[15]
Ohio[16]
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(4) https://dhhs.arkansas.gov/wa_ccli/FacilitySearch.aspx
(5) https://gateway.cdhs.state.co.us/cccls/PublicFileReview.aspx
(6) http://204.90.20.58/childcare/provider/providersearch.aspx
(7) http://www.sitesearch.decal.state.ga.us/georgiadecal/Sites/SiteSearch.aspx?childcare=y&newsearch=y
(8) https://secure.in.gov/apps/fssa/carefinder/index.html
(9) http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/brs_cdc/sr_lfl.asp
(10) http://www.nebraska.gov/LISSearch/search.cgi
(11) http://childcaresearch.dhhs.nh.gov/
(12) http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/ccfs_facilitysearch/
(13) http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/dc/daycarelist.shtml
(14) http://ncchildcaresearch.dhhs.state.nc.us/search.asp? lang=English
(15) http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childcare/staff/index.aspx
(16) http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/cdc/query.asp
(17) http://204.87.68.21/childcarefind/
(18) http://www.emp.state.or.us/ccd-complaints/
(19) http://childcare.sc.gov/main/general/facilities/search/index.aspx
(20) http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Search_Texas_Child_Care/ppFacilitySearchDayCare.asp

(21) http://www.brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us
(22) http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/licensed.cgi
(23) https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/f2ws03esaappsns/lccis/lccisSearch.aspx

mlive.com
Everything Michigan

Officials close Bay County, Mich., day care center

Posted by Paul Wyche | The Saginaw News May 28, 2008 19:03PM

WILLIAMS TOWNSHIP -- Another mid-Michigan home day care provider is in hot water, and state officials have closed her operation here.

The Bay County Sheriff's Department expects to send its findings to the prosecutor's office possibly as early as today regarding Linda Mochty's Tots N Tikes, said Sgt. John Babiarz.

Investigators said the probe involves alcohol consumption but would not provide further details.

Earlier this month, Mochty reached an agreement with the state Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing to shut down her Williams Township business. The News could not reach her, but a man answering the phone at the 20-child day care said "she is in the hospital.

Tots N Tikes received a license renewal in February after promising to correct several problems, including a lack of staff training and written records of fire and tornado drills, bureau records indicate.

A state inspector also spotted an infant sleeping in a car seat. Two years ago, the bureau issued a suspension order and notice of intent to revoke the license of Gina Danielson, 5481 Brockway in Saginaw Township, for a similar infraction that resulted in the death of 10-month-old Charles "Charlie" Bolger.

An autopsy determined the baby suffocated in the straps of a car seat where Danielson put him for a nap because all of her cribs were full, authorities said.

State regulations require day care centers to provide cribs for all infants younger than 1. Making other arrangements, though, is a common violation, said officials at the bureau, a division of the Department of Human Services.

Bay County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Nancy Borushko said she is awaiting the Tots N Tikes report but is unsure whether charges will follow this week.

"I know they're working on it," she said, "but nothing has come across my desk as of yet."

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May 27, 2008

De-emphasis on Race in Adoption Is Criticized

By RON NIXON

WASHINGTON — Minority children in foster care are being ill-served by a federal law that plays down race and culture in adoptions, a report released on Tuesday said.

The report, based on an examination of the law's impact over a decade, said that minority children adopted into white households face special challenges and that white parents need preparation and training for what might lie ahead.

But it found that social workers and state agencies fear litigation and stiff penalties under the law for even discussing race with adopting couples. As a result, families often do not get the counseling they need. It also found that states have ignored an aspect of the law that requires diligent recruitment of black parents.

The report recommends that the law — the Multiethnic Placement Act, which covers agencies receiving federal dollars and promotes a color-blind approach — be amended to permit agencies to consider race and culture as one of many factors when selecting parents for children from foster care.

The report was issued by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a nonprofit adoption advocacy and research organization based in New York. Several child welfare organizations — including the Child Welfare League of America, the Adoption Exchange Association, the National Association of Black Social Workers, Voice for Adoption and the Foster Care Alumni of America — have endorsed the report.

The report points out that transracial adoption itself does not produce psychological or other social problems in children, but that these children often face major challenges as the only person of color in an all-white environment, trying to cope with being different.

"The idea of being color-blind is great, and we'd all like to get there," said Adam Pertman, executive director of the Adoption Institute. "But the reality is that we live in a very race-conscious society, and that needs to be addressed. We can't simply pretend that the problem doesn't exist and leave it up to the child to cope."

Many transracial adoptees say they struggle to fit in among their own family members. Shannon Gibney, 33, a writer in Minneapolis who describes herself as biracial, was adopted by a white couple who tried their best by providing things like books by black authors.

"But having books and other things about blacks is no substitute for actual experience," Ms. Gibney said. "When I had questions about even little things like how to wear my hair, there was no one around to help me with my questions."

"This validates my experience," Ms. Gibney added, when informed of the study. "I'm glad they recognize the fact that you just can't say we're all human or love will be enough."

The report comes as the current federal law and polices governing consideration of race in adoption are being examined by the United States Commission on Civil Rights. It seems certain to add to the often heated debate among social workers and the public about the proper role of race in adoption, which has gone on since white couples began adopting minority children in larger numbers in the 1970s.

Christine M. Calpin, associate commissioner at the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services, had not seen the report, but she said the law had helped minority children in foster care find permanent homes.

"I have not seen any research which suggests that federal law has not been beneficial to minority children," Ms. Calpin said. "We have seen what happens when race is allowed to be a consideration. Children are waiting longer in foster care to be adopted."

Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act in 1994 after several white couples said they had not been provided the opportunity to adopt minority children. The law prohibits delaying or denying a child's foster care or adoptive placement on the basis of race or nationality.

The original law did allow race to be used as one of many criteria for evaluating parents for adoption. But two years later, after white couples said they were still being denied the opportunity to adopt minority children, Congress passed an amendment that said race could not be used as a criterion.

Supporters of the current law say it has led to an increase in transracial adoptions and a decrease in the amount of time minority children spend in foster care before being adopted.

An examination by The New York Times of the 2000 census — the first in which information on adoptions was collected — showed that just over 16,000 white households included adopted black children. Data from the Department of Health and Human Services shows that the adoption of black children by white couples has gone up each year since 1998, to 26 percent in 2004 from 14 percent.

Those who support transracial adoptions counter that race-matching or trying to find parents from the child's ethnic group can delay adoptions of minority children and that the practice should not be resurrected.

"The research simply argues against the broad notion that transracial adoption doesn't work out for children," said Rita Simon, a sociologist at American University who has written several books on transracial adoption and helped get the Mulitethnic Placement Act passed.

Ms. Simon said her 20 years of research did not show that white parents lack the ability to properly prepare children to deal with discrimination.

The new report takes issue with research that says the Multiethnic Placement Act is responsible for the increased number of minority children adopted from foster care. Minority children are still disproportionally

represented in foster care. Black children, for example, make up 15 percent of all children, but they represent almost a third of children in foster care.

The report also points out that although the time a child spends in foster care has declined, black children still wait an average of nine months longer than white children before they are adopted. The report also cites one study that found that only 5 percent of white parents who express some willingness to adopt a black child in foster care actually did so.

According to the report, some of the delay could be related to relatives' deciding to adopt, and some to the lack of enforcement of a part of the law that requires states to vigorously recruit black adoptive parents. But states are not penalized if they fail to do so.

But states can and do face stiff penalties for violating federal law by using race to deny white parents the right to adopt nonwhite children.

In 2003, social workers in Ohio were accused of discriminating against a white couple by requiring them to prepare a plan to address the child's cultural needs and to evaluate the racial demographics of their neighborhood. The state paid $1.8 million in fines.

In 2005, a social service agency in South Carolina was fined $107,000 after workers used a database to match children to prospective adoptive parents, which the federal government said overemphasized race. These two examples have led litigation-jittery agencies to ignore race completely in placements, the report said.

Jae Ran Kim, a social worker in Minnesota and a transracial adoptee herself, said social service agencies felt damned if they do and damned if they don't.

"If you talk to parents about racial and cultural issues they are likely to face," Ms. Kim said, "you risk violating the law, and if you try to recruit families through minority organizations, even that can look like you are using race."

She added: "The law does need to reflect that fact that race is an issue in our society, and prospective white parents need to realize that this goes beyond whether you can love your child or even whether you live in a diverse neighborhood. This is about what is in the best interest of the child, not the parent."

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Study of '94 Adoption Law Finds Little Benefit to Blacks

Advertisement

By Darryl Fears
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, May 27, 2008; A02

A 1994 federal law that paved the way for more white adults to adopt black children has left many parents ill-equipped for the situation and has not achieved the goals of giving black children an equal chance of being adopted and recruiting more black adoptive parents, a study concludes.

The study, being released today, found that the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) did succeed in increasing the rate of black adoptions, but only by a small margin, and that black children still disproportionately end up in temporary foster homes.

Because the law forbids discussion of race during the adoption process, it prevents social workers from preparing white parents for the challenge of raising black children in a largely white environment, said the report, titled "Finding Families for African American Children: The Role of Race and Law in Adoption From Foster Care." It cited studies showing that dark-complexioned children in white homes tend to struggle with identity issues related to skin color, self-esteem and discrimination that their new parents are often not equipped to handle.

"To say that we need to be colorblind is an arguable notion," said Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York, which commissioned the study. "It's a wonderful notion in a perfect world. But most of us would agree that we're not there yet."

"Color consciousness does not mean you're going to do race-matching with kids," Pertman said. But "if you're white and you're adopting a black kid, maybe you could use a little coaching on that issue as you help your kid grow up. The law says you can't be trained to do that. Are we giving parents the optimal tools to succeed in bringing up their families?"

The report reflects concerns expressed by black social workers during a furious debate in the mid-1990s, while Congress enacted the law. The National Association of Black Social Workers opposed MEPA, arguing that white adoptive parents, no matter how loving, would have difficulty dealing with the racial issues their children would confront.

"We always felt race was important in placement decisions, and families need to be prepared for the impact of race on their decisions," Toni Oliver, a spokeswoman for the association, said last week. "For families to be denied, that has a detrimental impact."

But the president of the National Council for Adoption said the report is incorrect in asserting that MEPA requires a colorblind approach to transracial adoption. "Some state agencies have misinterpreted and executed the policy this way, but . . . guidelines are quite clear in allowing certain considerations of race," said the group's president, Thomas C. Atwood.

"There are additional challenges and responsibilities involved in parenting transracially adopted children. This is no revelation. I do not know of anyone who argues against this point," Atwood said. "However, the vast majority of transracial adoptive families are well aware of this reality and handle it quite well."

When MEPA was being considered, the debate over transracial adoptions split between people who held Atwood's view and those who sided with black social workers. Critics such as former senator Carol Moseley Braun (D-Ill.), a MEPA sponsor, said the social workers favored "race-matching," a position she called extremist when so many black children were up for adoption.

Before the passage of the law, black children typically languished in foster care an average of nearly three years.

Alarmed by those numbers, Harvard University sociologist Randall Kennedy castigated the social workers during that time, saying that there is "no justification for racial matching" and that the notion that same-race parents could better help children cope was dubious.

The law had not significantly changed the situation, the new report found. In 2006, black children represented 15 percent of the nation's children yet made up 32 percent of the half a million in foster care. Black children still waited longer for adoption than white children, and the adoption rate for black children barely rose from 17 percent of those awaiting adoption in 1996 to 20 percent in 2003.

The law did result in significant improvement in research into interracial adoption, the report said, including studies showing that black children adopted by same-race parents do not tend to experience race-related self-esteem issues as sharply as black children adopted by whites.

The report cited a 2006 study of dark-complexioned adoptees in white homes, which found that "for many children . . . a white skin color was so desirable that they rubbed themselves with white body lotion, cream or white chalk, or, alternatively, tried to wipe off the brown color."

Dark-complexioned children adopted from outside the United States were often similarly troubled. Children "adopted from Sri Lanka and Colombia who expressed the wish to be white or to have been born into the family had more behavior problems," the new report said.

A 2003 study quoted an adoptee living with a white family in a predominantly white community as saying: "If we lived in a different neighborhood, I'd feel more comfortable. People wouldn't ask me so many questions or call me names. I feel a little more comfortable around people who are my color because I know they won't call me names."

Despite these issues, the new report, written by Susan Livingston Smith, program and project director for the institute, supports interracial adoption. It concludes that the practice "itself does not produce psychological or social maladjustment problems in children."

But, Smith wrote, "transracially adopted children and their families face a range of challenges, and the manner in which parents handle them facilitates or hinders children's development."

The report urged Congress, which is reconsidering the law, to require better assessments of whether prospective parents can fulfill a child's needs, including those related to race. It also recommended racial coaching for parents who are willing to receive it. Finally, the report said the Department of Health and Human Services should enforce the law's provision calling for more efforts to recruit black adoptive parents.

"It's in the best interests of the child," Pertman said.

Atwood said the recommendation "is both misleading and dangerous." He said it would create a giant loophole that would make placement decisions "vulnerable to subjective and ideologically driven considerations."

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May 29, 2008

Colo., W.Va. gamblers could be nabbed for child support

Morning update

Vicki Smith
Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. - Deadbeat parents, listen up: Win big at the casino tables in West Virginia or Colorado, and your kids might win, too.

The two states are moving ahead with plans to garnish the winnings of casino gamblers who owe child support. West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources is working on a plan that could be in place within 90 days, while Colorado is rolling out its system July 1.

The proposals are another tool in a diverse arsenal that authorities already have to collect money from delinquent parents.

"We impose the same burden on banks; they must search their records. We do the same thing with brokerage houses and other businesses. Welcome to the club," said state Rep. Joel Judd, a Denver Democrat who fought for five years to overcome industry opposition and win approval from legislators.

"I'm not aware of anyplace else in society where we have large cash transactions like we do at the casinos," Judd said. "It just seemed to me that if a guy owes back child support and wins big, the kids ought to get the money."

Colorado's plan faced significant opposition from casino operators who argue it is difficult to track table winnings, and West Virginia is hearing the same. Critics say the programs impose an undue and unenforceable burden.

"A person could actually come to the casino, purchase $2,000 worth of chips, cash out $1,000 worth of chips, and it would look like he won $1,000. But the truth is, he lost $1,000," said West Virginia Racing Association President John Cavacini. "There's no system in place that would compute winning and losing."

Currently, the Internal Revenue Service requires casinos to report large payouts - over $600 on most forms of wagering, over $1,200 on slot play - but Cavacini said it is the obligation of the gambler to report income from table games.

The IRS also requires casinos to report cash prizes over $5,000 in tournaments and non-cash prizes worth more than $600.

While many states check big winners of traditional lottery games against lists of people who owe child support, the National Conference of State Legislatures believes Colorado and West Virginia would be first to go after casino winnings. Mississippi and New Mexico have statutes allowing casino payouts to be intercepted for child support debts, but neither is doing so.

Budget problems stalled development of an electronic interface in Mississippi, where child support officials also couldn't get an agreement with the casinos, said Stephanie Walton, a program manager for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The New Mexico Department of Human Services, meanwhile, can track winnings and match them to a list of delinquent payers, but it has no way to collect the money. Spokeswoman Betina Gonzales McCracken said the state simply gathers information on payouts over $1,200 as evidence for court

hearings.

Nor is there any way to predict how many people such systems would snare: Casinos are tourist destinations, and each state checks names and Social Security numbers against only its own database.

In the Colorado and West Virginia systems, casinos would garnish the winnings of delinquent gamblers on the spot - a prospect Judd said operators found unappealing.

"I told them, there is no other line of business better equipped to handle an angry customer than yours," he said.

But there are differences in the states' plans: While Colorado would go after all forms of winnings, West Virginia would initially focus only on table games.

West Virginia may target slots later, said Garrett Jacobs, deputy commissioner of the state child support bureau. But it must first determine how to apply the system to about 1,600 video poker bars.

Allowing employees at those clubs to access a secure system could compromise personal information, Jacobs said. The state also believes it would be unfair to force child-support checks on the four casinos without requiring the same of the smaller parlors that compete for their customers.

In Colorado, legislators passed a law to implement the new program. But in West Virginia, child-support officials are trying to bypass lawmakers. Because the West Virginia Lottery lacks jurisdiction to enforce the child-support plan, however, its success depends on the casinos' willingness to participate.

Spokeswomen for Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack and Mountaineer Casino Racetrack & Resort in Chester, W.Va., said they know too little about the plan to comment. But an executive with Tri-State Racetrack & Gaming Center in Nitro, W.Va., which will soon install table games, said collecting child support would be a hassle.

"I can certainly understand the problem, and I'm certainly sympathetic to the problem. But I'm also running a business," said Daniel Adkins, vice president of the casino's parent company, Michigan-based Hartman & Tyner Inc. "It seems like quite a burden to put on the operator."

Adkins said he would rather collaborate on a system both parties could live with, such as a periodic list of offenders' names that could be distributed to the casinos.

"We're partners in the state, no question about it," he said, "and I'm sure we could come up with a reasonable solution."

Associated Press writer Tom Breen in Charleston, W.Va., contributed to this report.

Assisted-living residents may face eviction

By Melissa Domsic
mdomsic@record-eagle.com

Thu, May 29 2008

—

TRAVERSE CITY -- Fears of eviction prompted tears and uneasiness for some local elderly assisted-living home residents, as well as for their friends, family and caretakers.

French Manor Inn on Seventh Street was foreclosed this week after Irwin Union Bank rejected the business' restructuring plan under Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Owner Trish Gilroy hopes an interested buyer will purchase the facility and prevent it from closing.

"I'm worried about how they're going to adjust to transition," Gilroy said of the 19 residents. "These people are fragile; there are a lot of women here in their 90s."

Norm Droste, Irwin Union Bank's lawyer, notified residents this week that the facility would be closed.

Gilroy filed for bankruptcy two years ago. Droste served eviction notices last June, but they were dismissed because the company was protected under bankruptcy terms. The business is no longer in bankruptcy, but its debt is approaching $2 million, 13th Circuit Judge Philip E. Rodgers said.

A potential purchaser is interested in operating the assisted-living home, Gilroy said. She wouldn't disclose the potential buyer's name, but said she hopes the deal occurs so residents aren't forced out.

Droste said he was "not aware of any qualified buyers."

"There's not an eviction notice," he said. "Judge Rodgers ordered Patricia Gilroy to discontinue operating the adult assisted-living facility and he ordered her to stop collecting rents from people and move them peacefully to new facilities."

Gilroy's attorney, Ann Stringer-Velez, said she plans to file suit against Irwin Union Bank and Droste for serving the notices. She called the action underhanded and unnecessary because of a possible sale.

Carol Harrigan is concerned for a friend who has dementia and lives at French Manor. She's also angry with the bank.

"They see that property as prime property near Munson," Harrigan said. "They're not thinking about the residents, the welfare. They're thinking about the greed."

French Manor employee Ashley Baker fears some residents won't live much longer if forced to move.

On Wednesday, one resident who has no nearby family was crying and feeling helpless, Baker said.

"They're upset," she said. "This is their home."

Gilroy recently agreed to a voluntary foreclosure of a continued care home across the street that housed four residents.

She closed the place last month and helped residents find a new place to live.

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Photos

Doris Richards is one of 19 residents of the French Manor Inn on Seventh Street in Traverse City who could be evicted.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Foundation gives more for human needs

, /2, 20/08

By Dave Alexander

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The Community Foundation for Muskegon County is giving more grants this year to agencies that meet basic human needs because tough economic times are making it increasingly hard for local families to maintain their standards of living.

The first round of unrestricted and "field of interest" fund grants for 2008 shows the foundation is granting money to help economically struggling people obtain food and health care, keep their homes and get access to social services.

The foundation will continue to give grants to the arts, community development and environmental causes. But more first-round money than in past years is going to support health, human services and educational needs, according to Arn Boezaart, vice president for programs at the foundation.

"Human services in this community are stretched beyond capacity and we see the needs are greater than ever," Boezaart said. "We can never pretend to fill all of the gaps that are out there, but we can try to assist a few."

The latest $190,886 in funding approved by the foundation Board of Trustees weighed heavily toward providing basic human needs in Muskegon County.

The community is struggling for well-paying jobs as workers and companies transition into the new global economy, energy and food-price hikes are hitting the working poor particularly hard, while record numbers of family homes are threatened with foreclosure.

Responding to basic community needs, this funding round includes:

* $20,000 from three separate funds to expand the Family Resource Centers into the Holton, Ravenna, Montague and Whitehall school districts. Family Resource Centers are a decentralized effort to bring basic social service agencies into local communities while consolidating the agencies in a one-stop service center.

Boezaart said the funding from the Youth Advisory Council, Thomas and Geraldine Seyfreth Fund and unrestricted dollars from the foundation's Distribution Committee sets up the centers in the four remaining school districts without such local service centers.

* The Julia Hackley Fund is providing $12,000 to the Neighborhood Investment Corp. to support its continued foreclosure counseling services for city of Muskegon residents. This is the first time such an effort has received foundation funds but it is an acknowledgment of a growing problem of foreclosed properties in Muskegon, Boezaart said.

* $9,000 for Love INC for emergency needs for city residents from the Hackley Fund.

* $10,620 from the Hackley Fund and $1,600 from the Seyfreth Fund to support food distribution operations of the Muskegon County Cooperating Churches.

* The Muskegon County Medical Society Fund gave $2,500 to the Wellness Program at Tanglewood Park to the Nutritional Services/Meal on Wheels program for senior citizens.

"The current circumstances find this community with poverty and human needs more challenging than before," said Boezaart, who had a long career in the Muskegon County social services sector prior to working for the foundation. "These needs are reflected in our grants."

That's not to say that the other grant priorities of the foundation are being ignored.

The Distribution Committee provided up to $25,000 to support the Third Street traffic circle public sculpture of artist Richard Hunt, "Muskegon Rising Together." The sculpture is to be unveiled in mid-June.

The city of North Muskegon received $10,000 to provide construction matching dollars for the North Muskegon portion of the Berry Junction Trail, which is a bike path link between Muskegon and Whitehall.

The Muskegon Lions Club Fund provided $8,000 to MOKA, a job-readiness program, for its Deaf-Hard of Hearing Connection to support this June's Camp-I-Can program at Pioneer Trails for youth and young adults.

The Environmental Endowment Fund granted the Mona Lake Watershed Council and the Sustainability Coalition $5,000 for a baseline recycling study in Muskegon County, while the White Lake Community Fund granted $4,000 for the Lights On After School program in Whitehall and Montague.

The Community Foundation for Muskegon County is a $125 million endowment designed to support the arts, education, Muskegon and downtown development, health, human services and environmental efforts in Muskegon County. One of the top 100 community foundations in the nation, it expects to grant $4.5 million in funds this year to community nonprofit agencies and to county students for post-high school scholarships and training.

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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Meijer's gift: free prenatal vitamins

Thursday, May 29, 2008

By Shandra Martinez

The Grand Rapids Press

WALKER -- Meijer Inc. is reaching out to soon-to-be moms by offering free prenatal vitamins.

Women who are pregnant or planning to have children can qualify with a doctor's prescription.

The program kicks off Saturday at all 181 Meijer pharmacies.

"Just as our free antibiotic program was designed to help our customers get healthy during these tough economic times, offering free prenatal vitamins will help our customers stay healthy during a very important time in their lives," said Nat Love, vice-president of pharmacy for the Walker-based retailer.

The free prenatal vitamin program will include several well-known brands, such as NatalCare Plus, Ultra Natal Care, Natal Care Glosstabs, Advanced NatalCare and NataTab Rx. These account for most of the prenatal prescriptions Meijer fills. The vitamins usually sell for $10 to $20 for a 30-day supply.

"Our department recommends pregnant women take prenatal vitamins to take care of their overall health and to prevent problems that can affect the baby's health," said Michigan Department of Community Health spokesman James McCurtis Jr. "I'm sure the state would be willing to partner -- like with any company that does a service of this magnitude -- with Meijer on getting the word out."

He added the state agency and local county health departments took a similar approach to let people know about the free antibiotics program offered by Meijer and competitor Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Meijer launched its antibiotics program in October 2006.

While not the first, Meijer is the biggest retailer in the country to offer free prenatal vitamins.

It is not known if Bentonville, Ark.-based Wal-Mart will follow suit. A company spokeswoman did not return a call from The Press.

While giving out free vitamins costs Meijer money, the program can be a smart business move, said Kevin Coupe, of the retail industry blog MorningNewsBeat.com.

"Women generally make all the shopping decisions," he said. "Anytime you can connect with moms before they have a child, you've hit a gold mine. Diapers, baby food, clothing -- Meijer sells all those things."

Meijer operates in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky.

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

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www.michigan.gov
(To Print: use your browser's print function)
Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

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McLaughlin Appointed Grand Traverse/Leelanau County DHS Director

May 28, 2008

Michigan Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed today announced the appointment of Dawn McLaughlin of Kingsley as director of the Grand Traverse/Leelanau County DHS effective June 2, 2008.

"Dawn has demonstrated significant administrative skills and has extensive experience in children's foster care, child protection, juvenile justice and other areas," Ahmed said. "I am confident that, as director of the dual Grand Traverse/Leelanau offices, she will continue to provide quality leadership."

As Grand Traverse/Leelanau DHS director, McLaughlin will be responsible for the administration of federal cash assistance programs, as well as child and adult services including protective services, adoption services and foster care services.

McLaughlin has been a DHS employee for 22 years and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in behavioral psychology and a Master of Arts degree in counseling psychology, both from Western Michigan University. She is married and the mother of three children.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

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Agency: Human Services

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Michigan Heart Gallery 2008 Exhibit in Ann Arbor
Exhibit helps find adoptive families for foster children

Contact: Jan Berry at (517) 373-7394 or
Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange
Regina Funkhouser, Michigan Heart Gallery Coordinator
(800) 589-6273

May 28, 2008

What: The 2008 Michigan Heart Gallery, a touring photographic exhibit featuring stirring portraits of 60 Michigan foster children who are waiting to be adopted, is on display at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum in Ann Arbor May 29 - June 9. The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take the pictures that help capture the spirit of the children in the foster care system.

The Michigan Heart Gallery is a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services. Today, in Michigan, there are more than 4,000 children without families. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted into a loving and caring home.

When: May 29 - June 9

Where: The Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum, 220 E. Ann Street, Ann Arbor

Ten Things you should know:

1. At any given time there are about 4,000 children in Michigan's foster care system who are available and waiting to be adopted.
2. Last year in Michigan almost 2,600 children were adopted through Michigan's foster care system.
3. Most families who adopt are also licensed foster parents or relatives. In fact, last year in Michigan, 93 percent of children adopted from the foster care system were adopted by a foster parent or relative.
4. All adoptive families must go through a family assessment process that includes an education component, background checks, and an exploration of the family's interest in adopting.
5. Because the needs of each child are different, many different types of families are needed. You don't have to married to adopt, and you don't need to be wealthy or own your own home.
6. Many of the children waiting for adoption are school-age or older, may need to be adopted along with siblings, or may have special placement needs.
7. About 500 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21 transition or "age out" of the foster care system annually. Studies of youths who have left foster care without being adopted have shown they are more likely than those in the general population to not finish high school, be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance. Many find themselves in prison, homeless, or becoming parents at an early age.
8. The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is an information and referral program that can help answer some of your questions about adoption. Contact us at (800) 589-6273 or visit our Web site at www.mare.org.
9. The Heart Gallery is a project of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. It is our hope the Michigan Heart Gallery will inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child so these children can become part of a loving family and have a chance for a brighter, happier future.
10. Consider fostering, adopting or mentoring a waiting child!

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