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Legislators square off over child rights law

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Moves to change the state's juvenile code, relax the role of probate court in status offense cases continues to set legislative sparks flying in Lansing.

State Representative Mark Clodfelter, D-Flint, is making his third attempt in as many years at having his reform bill pass. But Republican opponents argue that instead of helping juveniles, the bill will aggravate neglect of battered children, disturb the family structure and allow lax treatment of serious juvenile crime.

Status offenses include truancy, running away and incorrigibility.

Where supporters praise the bill, detractors condemn it.

"It's basic problem is that it treats kids as adults," said State Representative Wilbur (Sandy) Brotherton, R-Farmington.

Under present law, juvenile courts are part of the situation from the first formal complaint against a child for status offenses. Clodfelter's bill would prohibit children accused of status offenses from being placed in a jail cell unless they run away from a court-ordered minimum security facility.

MINIMUM SECURITY centers for children who have run away or repeatedly skipped school would be regarded as the last resort, according to the proposal.

Juveniles with records of repeatedly

running away from school wouldn't automatically be sent to a detention center. Foster homes, counseling and runaway shelters would investigate the reasons behind the behavior and attempt to solve the family's problem outside of court.

If these measures fail to alleviate the problems, then the courts are called into the situation.

Opponents such as Brotherton argue that the court's position would be diluted if the bill passed.

"There may never be a time for the court to intervene," he said.

Children couldn't be restrained for running away or truancy, argued Brotherton. Instead they must be offered counseling which they could refuse. The court's role would be limited to some legal services and reviewing the child's case, periodically.

Clodfelter sees the court's role differently.

"It (this bill) doesn't remove court jurisdiction over status offenders. It invokes that after voluntary community resources have been tried and failed. But it does provide them that they go to court," he said.

UNLIKE BROTHERTON, Clodfelter takes the position that truancy is a problem better addressed outside of court by sitting down and talking with the family.

"The evidence is overwhelming that when the court is involved, the risk is high they (juveniles) turn around and do it again," he said.

His bill provides that when the matter does appear in court, judges must review the case periodically and put

into writing the reason for the court's judgements and actions.

Clodfelter sees this as a deterrent against "sloppy" bench practices when dealing with juveniles. His proposal would allow minors to have persons of their choice attend and observe all court hearings. This, supporters say, would open up juvenile court to the public eye in much the same manner that scrutiny works for adult court.

Brotherton doesn't see this provision as a move toward better court procedures for juveniles. Instead, he warns it may be harmful for the minors.

"Anything in the record is now protected," Brotherton said.

To make it public record would mean exposing such incidents as incest to public scrutiny. The written reaction of social workers and juvenile officers to these incidents would be open for the

child and public to see, according to Brotherton.

"SOCIAL WORKERS have said to me that it can be extremely damaging to a child to open court proceedings to the public. School kids can go to court and see these things aired in public. It's another cross for the kids (defendants) to bear."

The bill provides juveniles placed in detention are sheltered in special facilities away from adult criminals. The practice of placing children in an adult jail would be replaced by a network of runaway shelters and counseling facilities.

Brotherton objects to the cost of constructing these detention facilities and raises the question of how the northern part of the state would deal with the issue.

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Fire vandals hit the halls at high school

By MARY GNIEWEK

Lockers were decorated with paper Valentines, some girls carried long-stem pink carnations, and one North Farmington High student marked last Thursday by torching a paper sign near the cafeteria.

That was the latest in a series of small fires at the school at 32900 W. 13 Mile Road. Like the other fires, no injuries were reported and damage was minimal. But the culprit is still at large.

Farmington Hills Police Officer Jerry McKenzie, who works in the juvenile division, said his department has some suspects and is working on the case.

"A lot of kids are getting ticked off at whoever's doing it," said Helen Prutow.

Mrs. Prutow is a trustee on the Farmington Board of Education and has a son attending North. Thursday's incident was the third this month. It was preceded by chairs set afire outside an auditorium door and a paper towel fire in a restroom. Last month, a laboratory fire was reported.

"We've had more calls there than at other schools," said William Gearhart, a Farmington Hills fire marshal.

"We send two fulltime men out to make delayed reports, it's not like a fire run."

Still, it's a situation school administrators say they don't like. But as one reason, "When you get 1,000 in a building, something gets damaged. Schools get a lot of hard use."

Small fires have not been the only problems plaguing the school. Farmington Hills police were called out Feb. 7 for what turned out to be an unexplained bomb threat.

"IF WE'D CATCH (the culprit) we'd suspend. But it's rather difficult," said school Principal Clayton Graham.

Before the end of last semester, some teachers' names appeared in graffiti on the walls of the school. Graham also said a wall outside the au-

ditorium was bricked in after windows there were smashed.

"We don't like it, but it's no greater or less in degree than in the past," Graham said.

"The good kids do far outweigh the negative or we'd all bail out."

Last year the Farmington school district suffered two expensive acts of vandalism: a \$1,400 loss after a breaking and entering at Silwassee Elementary School in Farmington and \$500 damages resulting from a locker fire at North Farmington High.

The cost to the district so far this year is untabulated.

"So far it's been a pretty good year," said Scott Bacon, an administrative assistant for the school district.

"We don't compile figures until the end of the school year when a report is submitted to the board of education."

North has 1,200 students this year. Like incoming 10th graders at the district's two other high schools, North's sophomores received a code of student conduct in September.

"AS KIDS MATURE, they should be more independent," Graham said. "We have no hall monitors or supervisors with eagle eyes."

"We could go on the public address system every day and drum up enthusiasm against (vandalism) but that can get kind of negative. So we become tired. How much information do you let go, how much do you hold back?"

Graham believes the students and faculty enjoy an excellent rapport. "Just look at their performance record, these kids have done OK," he said.

As he spoke, most of North's students had left for the day. But a handful of kids dressed in gym gear jogged through the halls, a cheerleading squad walked by the office, and the library across the hall was full of kids pouring over open books.

"The problems come and go," said Lynn Nutter, Farmington assistant superintendent of instruction.

"It only takes one youngster to drive you up the tree."



Orchard Lake Road blues

For years now, residents have been irritated by the rush hour traffic jams on Orchard Lake Road. It didn't get any better the other day

when workmen had to come to the rescue of a broken water main at the corner of Orchard Lake and Grand River. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

Honor thy self

Who's Who gets educators' low mark

By MARY GNIEWEK

About this time of year, the publishers of Who's Who Among American High School Students are beginning to solicit names for a 1990 edition.

Farmington school officials don't give the publishers who annually print names of thousands of high school juniors and seniors cited for academic achievement their seal of approval.

In fact, they use words like "money-making" and "solicitous" to describe the organization.

Who's Who bills itself as "the largest and leading student achievement book series in the country."

Published since 1967 by Educational Communications Inc. of Northbrook, Ill., last year its eight volumes (it's distributed regionally) listed 335,000 names.

Students contacted by the company can get their name and a four line biography printed in the book at no cost. But a mail campaign urges those listed to buy not only a copy of the book for \$19.95 plus \$3 for shipping, but a whole line of Who's Who gadgetry, from mugs to bumper stickers.

Want a picture to accompany the biography? That can be accomplished for an extra \$5, or \$3 if you buy the book.

Company literature suggests that high school principals and guidance counselors nominate students, but the Michigan Principals Association, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, and the American School Counselors Association urge members not to participate.

SOME FARMINGTON students listed in the 1979 edition speculate the company probably received their names from organizations which gave them scholarships.

North Farmington High senior Caroline Broida was listed in Who's Who last year.

"There was a series of letters," she recalled. "The first one said I was nominated, the second one said congratulations."

"They sent me a four-page form with a list of 70 or 80 school clubs to check off if I belonged. There was a questionnaire and they wanted to know my grade point average."

"It didn't cost me anything because I didn't buy the book."

"They sent me a flier that said I could buy a Who's Who cup, a medalion, a bumper sticker for my car. I didn't buy anything. I just did it for the honor."

"They even said they'd send my name to all the colleges I wanted to go to next year for a \$1 or \$1.50 fee. I never followed through with that, either."

Mrs. Lois Kulba of Farmington said she was suspicious of the letter her daughter Aileen received from Who's Who last year.

"She wasn't very enthusiastic about filling out the biographical information, but I told her to go ahead as an experiment."

AILEEN SENT in the required information and then received various letters from Who's Who asking her to buy the book and related items. They included pins, charms and mugs for \$8.99 apiece, a plaque for \$12.95, and a certificate for \$2.95.

When the company sent a press release to the Farmington Observer last month listing local students named in the 1979 edition, Aileen's name wasn't included.

"We were wondering if it was an oversight, or if she wasn't listed because she didn't buy a book," Mrs. Kulba said.

But interviews with several others mentioned in the press release revealed that none of them had pur-

chased copies of the book, either.

Susan Blomquist had purchased a 1978 edition when she was listed as a junior at North Farmington High. She declined the second time around.

Though Caroline Broida, Aileen Bregni, Diane DeMarco, Aileen Kulba and Susan Blomquist believe they are listed in the 1979 edition, none has seen a copy of the book.

"I tried to find it, but neither the Farmington or the Southfield library carries the book," Miss Broida said.

If she would've checked the Detroit public library, she would've found that they don't carry the book, either.

So for whose benefit is Who's Who published? Sceptics say for vanity sake and for company profit. But the company claims the majority of students do not buy their book. And they won't discuss profits.

"As a private corporation, the publisher reserves the right to hold release on sales figures," company literature says.

"I think most high schools don't recognize that outfit," said Harrison High School principal James Geiger.

"They just ask for names and sell the books to parents. I don't think there's much discrimination about whom they'd turn away. It's a money-making organization."

Scott Scherrer is sentenced for bond fraud

A Farmington Hills attorney who pled guilty to 17 charges related to operating counterfeit bond and land sale schemes was sentenced to from two to 14 years in prison on Friday.

P. Scott Scherrer, the subject of an intensive investigation by local and county law enforcement authorities last spring, was sentenced before Oakland Circuit Judge George LaPlata.

After the morning hearing in Pontiac, Scherrer was sent to the State Prison of Southern Michigan at Jackson, where he will serve all terms concurrently.

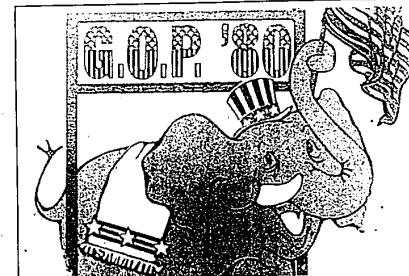
He was charged with embezzlement,

uttering and publishing false bonds, taking money under false pretenses over \$100, operating as an unlicensed broker dealer, and fraudulent acts in the sale of securities.

Scherrer made no request for an appeal bond.

Court clerk Steve Kaplan said Scherrer will be eligible for parole in 15 months. Scherrer will get credit for 14 days already served in jail.

"Basically our post in the case is one of neutrality," said Oakland County Prosecutor Michael Izzo. "We leave that strictly to the discretion of the court."



The Republicans are coming and so are the memorabilia salesmen. To see what they have to offer to remember the GOP, turn to page 3A. (Staff photo)

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Reyes Syndrome

It can be frightening, this childhood disease. But for at least one family it has demonstrated a story of courage and love. To read more turn to page 1B.