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Juvenile law reform sought by coalition

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

During the International Year of the Child, a coalition is mounting yet another campaign to reform the juvenile justice code.

Last year, House Bill 6184, an attempt at reforming the existing system, wasted away in Lansing for lack of support.

Among the issues which divided support of the bill were its stand on status offenders, jailing of minors and its definition of emotional neglect.

Still facing these issues, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice Reform and the Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies are formulating another bill which would address some of the problems in Michigan's juvenile justice system.

This year's strategy for passing the bill could include another effort to have the House Judiciary Committee look at the bill and to persuade the juvenile court judges to endorse it, according to Ed Overstreet, assistant executive director of Boysville of Michigan, which has its offices in Farmington Hills.

Last year, the bill's efforts to eliminate status offenses lost it support from the juvenile court judges.

STATUS OFFENSES are acts which aren't felonies if they are committed by an adult. They include running away from home, truancy from school, immoral behavior, frequenting taverns and having immoral companions. "Status offenders are incarcerated longer than criminal offenders," said Overstreet.

Instead of placing status offenders in jail, Overstreet would like to see the state provide for community based alternative services. Ideally, the services would range from programs for juveniles who are a threat to themselves and the community to youngsters whose behavior fall into lesser ranges of delinquency.

Juveniles should be able to participate in residential programs which would consist of six to 10 youngsters living together with adult supervision in a house. The next step in the program would be to help them integrate back into the mainstream of society, Overstreet suggests.



North Farmington cheerleader Cheryl Gravius cheers on the school's basketball team which is slated to launch its playoff bid against Walled Lake Western tomorrow. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Counseling in the residential homes would be carried over into the schools. Students who cause trouble in the schools could be counseled instead of suspended, he said.

Besides dealing with status offenses which become part of a juvenile's police record, the bill would take a different approach to jailing youngsters.

ORIGINALLY, last year's bill proposed to phase out jailing minors with in the following three to five years. Juveniles under age 17 can be jailed under the present code for certain offenses.

The bill also proposed to define emotional neglect. Under the original bill, emotional neglect was defined as being present if there was physical injury to the child or if physical injury was imminent, if the child was sexually abused or harmed through neglect or if the youngster was abandoned.

In an attempt to facilitate the bill's passage last year, the definition was changed to refer to a minor in need of care or who lacked the necessary guidance and supervision.

Those criteria to measure emotional abuse were found to be too nebulous by Overstreet.

The court system would determine emotional neglect under the substitute

language, Overstreet said. Since that's the procedure now followed, the new language wouldn't change anything.

JUVENILE justice systems have their beginnings in the middle of the last century when Cook County, Ill., instituted the first juvenile code.

That code was established to prevent youngsters from facing adult sentences which included capital punishment.

But in recent years, Overstreet says, the trend in juvenile justice has been directed back to confronting juveniles with adult sentences and adult justice systems.

The trend has developed to the point the American Bar Association has recommended that plea bargaining, due process and the right to representation be part of the juvenile court system.

As Overstreet sees it, the juvenile system is beginning to act and look like the adult system.

"And when you look at the adult system, you're not sure if that's working," he says.

The move to reform the juvenile code would help to offset the trend toward presenting juvenile offenders with adult standards of justice, he says.

If the bill fails to pass this year, after a six-year fight, there may be a cooling off period until the 1980's.

Students tackle aging problems in competition

Growing old may not be of paramount importance to a group of 12- and 13-year-olds, but they showed no indication of boredom or apathy last week at Warner Junior High.

Questions on aging flowed steadily for nearly an hour from an enthusiastic audience — 30 seventh graders in Eddy Ellegood's 8 a.m. advanced English class. The occasion was a session in creative problem solving chaired by Sharon Higham, gifted program coordinator.

Ms. Higham arranged a panel discussion that featured Lillian Rosinger, head of the local chapter of the Gray Panthers, and Karen Ross, senior adult coordinator at Mercy Center.

As part of a national competition in creative problem solving, the students will form several mini-groups this week to discuss solutions to problems they talked about: senior housing, living on a fixed income and changing society's negative attitudes about the elderly.

Their solutions will be mailed to Nebraska, where they will be judged with entries from students across the country. The lesson in "futuristics" is designed to help students find solutions to problems that are expected to intensify in coming years.

"Every year, a greater number of people are growing old. It's a situation we have never had before," Ms. Higham told the class. "The nuclear family is splitting up. By 1985, we will have a large population over 60 years of age."

MRS. ROSS WAS THE first panelist to address the class.

"We can no longer assume that a family will be responsible for care of its elderly. More and more families are putting their elderly in nursing homes or senior citizen housing," she said. "It's impossible for many families to take care of their elderly."

"Old people don't want to be labeled senile or unproductive," she continued. "They're becoming more active with leisure pursuits."

Mrs. Ross cited Mercy's program at

the Gathering Place, 28600 Eleven Mile Rd. The center offers classes, tax aid, information and companionship. For 50 cents, seniors can get transportation to the center from home. (The federal government picks up the rest of the tab.)

In her address, Mrs. Rosinger explained the role of the Gray Panthers. She helped form the local chapter last September.

"The Gray Panthers is not a senior citizens group. It is a mixture of young and old people working for the rights of the elderly. Twenty percent of our membership is between 20 and 30 years old. There's an active lobby in Washington working for better legislation."

"We object to segregation of the elderly. We want to raise social consciousness. We also object to money being taken out of the human services budget and put into the military budget."

Mrs. Rosinger said that at 62, she feels no different than she did 15 years ago.

"I believe that if you stay active at every stage, if you don't sit around and worry, you'll have no time to think about dying."

"One student asked if it was possible that his attitude about senior citizens has been passed down to him from his parents."

"Many myths about how old people are supposed to act have been passed down to children from parents," Mrs. Rosinger answered. "There are many people in nursing homes today that don't want to be there. People get old and sick very fast in nursing homes. We have to find alternatives."

In answer to other questions, the panelists said that old people should interact with other age groups, that such interaction would be mutually beneficial, that elderly people should not be stereotyped, and that small group living in a community is one alternative to nursing homes.

"Nine-tenths of being old is what you think you are," one student philosophized.

Y's Farmington Flyers complete good season

The Farmington Flyers, the area YMCA's swim team, wrapped up its successful season Feb. 17 with a 145-117 win over the Highland Park YMCA Sea Devils.

The Flyers finished with a 6-4 league record, claiming the championship for the second consecutive year.

Highlights in the final meet were the qualifications for the state championships by Jenny Herzog in the 15 to 18

girls 50 yard freestyle, with a time of 28.61.

Also qualifying for the state was the boys 9:10 200 yard freestyle relay team of Jim Surwiece, Fred Hoskins, Doug Durham and Nathan Hutton, with a time of 2:17.61.

The team was coached by Paul Lou Henrich, a junior from Central Michigan University. She will accompany the team to the district invitational, state and B district meets.



Spring's in sight

While most of us have been bracing for still more winter cold, Farmington area residents found out last week what a little thaw will do to remind us what spring will bring — showers, mud and messy roads. (Staff photo)

Veteran backpacker eyes Appalachians

By MARY GNIEWEK

While other kids hop in their cars and head for Florida next month, John Wise, a senior at Farmington High, will opt for backpacking in the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina.

"I have no desire to be on a crowded beach. I prefer nature," he said. "I feel more at home there."

Wise, 17, will be roughing it with basic food, clothing, shelter and a 10 pound pack on his back that will be carried seven miles a day over mountainous terrain.

"I love it," he said. "It's a total nature experience."

Wise has been through the Appalachians six times. He's also trekked the Adirondacks in upstate New York, climbed the Alps in Austria and pondered the quiet beauty of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado.

Like many of his previous jaunts (fifteen to be exact), this trip is sponsored by the Farmington YMCA. The spring trip is at full capacity, but the Y will sponsor several backpacking and canoe trips this summer. Prices range from \$100 to \$300.

"This group is going to be bigger than most," he said. "We have about fifty going — mostly 16 and 17 year olds."

All Y-sponsored trips are coed, and the ratio runs 80 to 20 in favor of females.

"I don't know why it's that way. People are often surprised by that figure," he said.

THE TRIP WILL be supervised by Dave Heiser and a few student leaders, including Wise. The ratio is five hikers to one leader. The group generally stays close together, but hikers have time to explore on their own.

The excursion is aimed at beginning backpackers, with the purpose of helping them become familiar with the sport. Radios and books are discouraged.

"They're bulky and you don't really need them," Wise said.

The troupe will arrive at Nantahala National Forest by bus. They'll begin a 28 mile trek through the foot trails on an old logging road.

Each hiker is responsible for his or her own pack, sleeping bag and boots. The Y provides food, transportation, tents and leadership.

Only dehydrated food is carried because it's lightweight. The menu includes powdered scrambled eggs, french toast, hash browns, Spam, peanut butter and jelly, spaghetti, tuna and chicken a la king.

"There's about 15 cups of water to one cup of food. It tastes liquid, but it's adequate and balanced."

Everyone carries a small first aid kit with essentials like cream for mosquito bites and bandages for a backpacker's nightmare: foot blisters.

WISE SAID THAT the most important thing to have on a backpacking trip is a good pair of broken-in hiking boots. Lightweight clothing, light in color so as not to attract insects or excessive heat, is also preferred.

Each hiker also carries a portion of the tent. Two or three campers sleep in one tent.

"Most of the day is spent on the trails. We stop to eat, take pictures, and enjoy nature. Most of the hikers have never had the experience. Time goes quickly."

Petitions' popularity to increase

The trend toward referendum ballot questions and recalls of public officials is yet to reach its peak of popularity, according to Michigan State University professor Charles Press.

With a recall threat in its recent past and an advisory referendum question on special zoning for senior citizen housing slated in November, Farmington Hills is typical of public feeling around the nation.

Press, a political science professor, says voters' moods usually are cyclical. The current upsurge in initiatory petitions and various kinds of referendums can be expected to follow the conventional 10-year trend, with the peak still ahead, he says.

Last November, Michigan had about one dozen petitions and referendums, including the Jarvis, Tisch and Headlee drives for tax cuts. Farmington Hills voters will be asked whether they approve of the present RCE-1 zoning which allows construction of senior citizen housing up to a height of 60 feet.

Opponents fear that such zoning would open the floodgates for other developers who wish to build mid-rise buildings for purposes other than senior citizen housing.

"Referendums aren't new," says Press. "They began with the Progressives' drive for reforms, starting in Oregon in 1902, and are prominent chiefly in the northwest and midwest states."

"One of Michigan's major initiative actions was in 1940 with the putting aside of the old spoils system of government appointment and its being replaced by the civil service system which still operates."

Press speculates on the various reasons for the marked increase in such voter activity.

"There has been a growing distrust of government," he says. "Some of it is spinoffs from the emotional and political attitudes about Vietnam and Watergate."

"Some legislators are hesitant to act in areas which could diminish their personal popularity with important segments of the voting public, and the voters grow impatient with them. There is, too, a general misunderstanding by some voters."

As to who is behind most petitions and referendums, Press says the ability to use this method generally comes from three groups.

They are those with money, such as manufacturers, labor unions and retailers; those with extensive memberships like antigun control enthusiasts or school teachers; and those who act on emotional and moral principles, like environmentalists and tax reformers.

Across the nation, the government provisions for initiatory provisions vary, he says.

"The Book of States, 1978-79" issued by the Council of State Governments, identifies 22 states in which initiative petitions are available. Such petitions may be direct and without legislative action, or indirect by requiring the legislature to act on a measure within a reasonable period before it is voted upon by the electorate.

Almost all of the 22 states and 11 others allow for initiative petitions also for local units of government. Michigan allows indirect petitions.

Three forms of referendums exist. The voters may petition, in 26 states, for a referendum, usually with the intention of repealing existing legislation.

In 22 states, legislatures may submit laws to the electorate for their approval. In 21 states, constitutional requirements exist for certain questions — often debt authorization to be submitted to the voters. Michigan falls into each of the three categories.

"Sometimes too much is demanded of the people, but most referendums don't result in unmitigated disaster, even though there may be second thoughts about the results, as there seems to be about Michigan's new bottle bill requiring returnable bottles and cans for beers and soft drinks," he says.

inside

FASHION AWARENESS

With the dawning of spring, fashion begins to peek its head around the corner. In today's suburban life section, both on the section front and on the a la Mode page, you'll see what we mean. Turn to Section B.

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