New child support guidelines consider both parents' income

By Kathy Parrish stoff writer

staff writer

It's hard for most people to say "child support" and smile.

For 18 months, a diverse group of state residents had to deal calmly with the emotional Issue. Their goal was to even out Michigan child support awards.

The result: a child support guideline to help judges, Iriends of the court and attorneys make sure children's needs are met after divorce.

"Divorce is an emotionally charged situation," explained Ulysses Hammond, who directs the Fieled of the Court Bureau.

"People need to step back and look at how it affects kiels."

THE PROPOSAL sets child support percentages which would be applied statewide.

It also puts forth ideas about how kids in fragmented families should be supported.

supported.

One the most important features is that both parents' income will now be considered when figuring child support.

considered when figuring child support. Previously, only the non-custodial par-ent's income was taken into account. It also stresses the importance of childrent's sharing in their parents' level of income. "In intact families, children share in their parents' level of living," said Brenda Wagenknecht-lyoy, assistant director of the Friend of the Court Bureau.

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– Ulvases Hammond Friend of Court director

Aiming to make awards more uni-form, the committee set standard per-centages of net income that non-custo-dial parents should pay for child sup-

port.

The percentages apply when both parents make the same amount of money or the custodial parents makes less income than the non-custodial. They go up or down one percent with each \$75 of net weekly income.

"As the parents' level of living in-creases or decreases, the childrens' level of living increases or decreases "We've always based child support on the needs of children and parents ability to pay," he said. "A lot of these things we've already been doing." IN LOOKING at child support state-wide, the Friend of the Court found awards vary greatly. Two bypothetical cases drew child support recommenda-tions from zero to \$70.50 and \$5 to \$44.25 weekly.

REQUIRED BY the 1983 Friend of the Court Act, the guidelines, drawn up a Child Support Guidelines Advisory Committee, will take effect July 1. Involved in the process were attor-neys, Friend of the Court referees, and advocates of mothers' and fathers' rights.

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The document will be revised to include suggestions made at seven state forums. The linah hearings were last week in Pontiae and Detroit.

"We're putting what we were doing for 16 months under a microscope and asking etilizens if the guidelines are comprehensive, fair, equitable," Hammod told 35 people attending the hearing in Oskland County's Commissional and County Friend of the Court referce Patrick Cronin, who was on the advisory committee, does not expect the new guidelines to change county practices much.

Also considered is the value of productive services" of the custodial parent." While some cases will vary, base support has been set at: 21.3 percent of net income for one child; 33.2 percent for two children; 41.5 percent for three children; and 47.7 percent for four or more children.

WHILE SETTING award percentages, the committee also drew up some basic principles to be applied to Mitchigan child support. They are:

• The guidelines are exactly that — guidelines. Individual cases may be considered on their own merits.

• Children have the right to share in the natural parents' level of living.

• Both parents are linancially responsible for the children.

• The guideline considers pre-existing support orders as well as split, alternating and joint custody.

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WHILE REALIZING break-ups hurt families financially, the committee stressed that children should be protected as much as possible.

Instead of using minimal state Department of Social Service figures when establishing child-raising costs, they chose instead to go with higher Department of Agriculture statistics.

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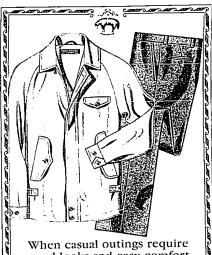
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