

Bills would cut time kids spend in foster care

By Warren M. Hoyt
special writer

The committee would monitor the children in foster care, prohibit placing children in unlicensed foster homes and require more frequent reviews by the probate court.

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THE PACKAGE would attempt to assure that children are "at home as much as possible. They should only be removed for safety reasons," said Stabenow, sponsor of HB 5171 which would enact much of the package.

Once a child is removed, however, "We should move as quickly as possible to get them to a permanent situation, either to go home or to another home," she said.

Foster care is supposed to be a temporary form of care, Binsfeld said, but it is becoming more permanent for some children. She will introduce the Senate portion of the package.

Coleman also said keeping a child in foster care for two years or more is "terrible. Children have to put down roots, they have to depend on someone."

The three said the state currently spends some \$75 million on foster care children. Approximately 11,400 children are in the system, 9,600 through the Department of Social Services and 1,800 through the probate courts.

INGHAM COUNTY Probate Court Judge Donald Owen said the full magnitude of the problem is not known publicly largely because foster care proceedings are closed to the public.

The package would:

- Create a six-member legislative

oversight committee to review the status of children in foster care homes.

- Require more frequent foster care reviews by the probate court, including an annual hearing on the permanent status of a child.

- Permit probate court judges to terminate parental rights in desertion, abuse, violation of court orders, mental deficiency, felony convictions or chronic abuse of other family members.

- Increase a child's age or jurisdiction for abuse and neglect matters from 17 to 18.

- Prohibit housing a child in unlicensed facilities or in homes where the

license is suspended or under review.

Encourage visitation by the natural parents unless it is shown to be clearly harmful.

A 500-BED expansion of the Muskegon prison facility is under consideration, Corrections Director Robert Brown reported.

The state is looking at building a new regional prison directly adjacent of the current 640-bed medium security unit because the area can support a second prison and because the public response to the current facility has been excellent, Brown said.

The department is looking at a 120-acre site southeast of the current prison for purchase.

If the legislature approves of a new facility at that location, a temporary 480-bed prison will be built immediately for \$4 million, Brown said, that could be open by mid-1988.

The state is currently 1,400 prisoners over its rated capacity. The department is currently building or planning facilities in Detroit and Macomb, Oakland, Lapeer, Jackson, Ionia and Wayne counties.

Hoyt is executive director of the Michigan Press Association.

27 towns sign pact to dispose of solid waste

Oakland County officials are pleased that so far 27 local units of government have signed up for incineration of solid waste, even though their goal was to sign up 46 by Dec. 13.

"Our minimum goal was to sign up communities which, in total, generate 600 tons of solid waste per day," said George Schutte, supervisor of the executive's solid waste division.

"However, the 27 communities which have signed have brought us over our minimum goal. Presently, those communities generate 1,000 tons of solid waste per day."

TOGETHER, the 46 communities generate 2,250 tons per day.

Observer & Eccentric area communities that joined the pact include: the cities of Rochester, Rochester Hills and Orchard Lake and the townships of Bloomfield, Oakland, Southfield and West of Bloomfield. (Southfield Township includes the villages of Franklin, Bingham Farms and Beverly Hills.)

"Now we can proceed ahead and start to detail a finance plan with these community representatives to begin providing incineration facilities," said County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

EACH COMMUNITY that approves the pact is to send a representative to a Municipal Solid Waste Board.

The board will approve contracts, finance and operating plans and present them to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners for final ratification.

"This is the first major step toward implementation of the Solid Waste Disposal plan," Murphy said.

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