

Many bills are introduced but few become law

By Tim Richard
staff writer

With nine strokes of Gov. James J. Blanchard's pen, state Sen. Rudy Nichols became one of the most successful members of the Legislature in getting bills passed.



Sen. Rudy Nichols of Waterford: nine bills passed of 19 introduced.

Blanchard recently signed a package of bills to toughen child support collection procedures.

Nichols, a freshman Republican from Waterford whose district includes greater Rochester, worked on a bipartisan team with Rep. Debbie Stabenow, a Democrat from Lansing, to win passage in both houses. But because Senate versions of the bills were adopted, Nichols' name goes on them.

It illustrates one of the quirks of Michigan legislative politics, where only one bill in a hundred ever becomes law.

BLANCHARD'S news office even gave credit to Nichols as prime sponsor of the package.

"Michigan continues to be one of the most successful states in the nation in its effort to collect child support," said Blanchard. The bills and their provisions:

- SB 224 amends the Friend of the Court Act to specify FOC responsibilities in enforcing support orders and to provide for reporting of information to governmental and consumer reporting agencies.

- SB 227 creates the Office of Child Support, replacing the Office of Central Registry for the Location of Absent Parents. The office is to develop a statewide information system and administer the enforcement of an order

of income.

- SB 228 amends the Support and Visitation Enforcement Act to allow a court to require a bond or impose a lien to secure payment of child support orders.

- SB 441 provides for the "interception" by the state Department of Treasury of tax refunds to be used to pay taxpayers' liabilities.

- SB 442, 443, 445 and 446 amend three acts — Family Support, Divorce and Child Custody — to require that orders entered under them be enforceable as provided in the Support and Visitation Enforcement Act.

- SB 444 creates the "Interstate Income Withholding Act," providing a mechanism for the withholding of income in other states.

That gave Nichols nine bills passed out of 29 introduced, one of the best batting averages in the Legislature. He was elected to the House in 1982 and a year later won the seat of Democratic Sen. Philip Maslin, who was recalled.

BUT LEGISLATORS, though they

frequently seek publicity on bills they have introduced, are quick to point out that numbers don't tell the story.

Lansing's two most powerful lawmakers — Senate Majority Leader John Engler, R-Mt. Pleasant, and House Speaker Gary Owen, D-Ypsilanti — rarely introduce legislation. Engler has introduced one bill, Owen, zero.

Being a member of a minority party hurts. Sen. Jack Faxon, a legislative veteran of 21 years, is a Democrat in a House run by Republicans. The Farmington Hills senator, whose district includes Southfield, is batting zero for 34. Sometimes members of one party will steal provisions of Sen. A's bill and tack it onto Rep. B's bill. The measure may pass, but Sen. A doesn't get credit.

Sen. R. Robert Coakle, R-Yorville, whose district includes Livonia, Plymouth and Canton, said Democrats in the House did this to his voter registration bill.

LEADERS OF the appropriations committees seem to have high batting averages, until one realizes that the Legislature must pass appropriations bills every year.

So Sen. Harry Gast, R-St. Joseph, the chairman, and James DeSana, D-Wyandotte, the vice chairman, have 3-for-5 and 9-for-31 records of bill passage, respectively.

Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, D-Detroit, has 18 stars behind her name. But they are all technical amendments to existing laws to delete references to the now-defunct Detroit House of Correction. Under the Michigan Constitution, a bill may address only one subject, so it took 18 bills to do the job.

Junior members of the Legislature rarely get bills passed and are well advised to concentrate on what is euphemistically known as "constituent service." Translation: Do odd jobs for the folks back home so you can get re-elected, earn seniority and become effective.

HERE'S HOW bills introduced by Oakland County legislators fared as of mid-December, when the Legislative Service Bureau made this compilation.

Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy — intro-

Of every 100 bills introduced in the Legislature, only one bill becomes law.

duced 29, saw four passed. Among topics are seat belts, workers comp appeal procedure, secondary mortgages and vehicle storage facility liens. Cruce is a freshman whose district includes Birmingham.

Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield — won on two of 22. The successful bills involved condemnation procedures and vehicle license plates of handicappers. His SEMTA reorganization bill passed the Senate but is held

up in the House. His district includes Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills.

Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield — zero for 17. The second-term member's district includes Lathrup Village.

Rep. W.V. (Sandy) Brotherton, R-Farmington — zero for 14. The five-term member's district includes the villages of Southfield Township.

Rep. Mat Dunakakis, R-Lake Orion — zero for seven. The third-term member's district includes Oakland Township.

Rep. Gregory Gruse, R-Madison Heights — zero for six. The freshman's district includes southern Troy.

Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield — one for 15. It requires mailing initial notice of assessment in

analysis

workers' comp claims.

Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham — one for three. It provides benefits for former governors not covered by present retirement laws. Her bill to make the honeybee the state insect received much publicity but not passage.

Rep. Gordon Sparks, R-Troy — one for six. It requires a mandatory suspension of the driver's license for forging a license. His district includes greater Rochester.

Oakland County now able to take calls from deaf

Hearing-impaired persons can call a special telephone number to receive information about Oakland county's governmental services or area businesses.

A person dialing 858-5511 will activate the county's new TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf). All calls will be greeted by an automatic answer message indicating the caller has reached Oakland County.

Inquiries may be left at any time for a follow-up response.

"SOMEONE WHO has TDD at home can call the county and leave a message with a trained operator," said Commissioner Marilyn Grogan of Bloomfield Hills. She worked on the project for two years with County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

"We've had a TDD in the sheriff's department for a few years, but we found people needed a central number to call for information other than in emergency situations," she said.

"If a person needs to contact the clerk's office or the courts, for example, he or she can make contact through the general information number of the TDD. An operator will either respond at that time or get back to the caller."

THERE ARE local numbers at the courthouse, for persons living far from the county seat of Pontiac, which may be used weekdays during business hours of 8:30 to 5.

Farmington area residents may call 849-7850. Southfield and Troy residents may call 645-1150. People calling one of those numbers should tap the space bar of their TDD repeatedly after their call has been answered by the general information operator to indicate theirs is a TDD call. Their calls will be transferred to the auto-answering TDD.

Dialing 858-5511 will activate the device.

Injury group to meet

The Michigan Injured Worker Organization will hear talks on compensation and disabilities when it meets at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23. Chairman Walter Crowley said the meeting will be in UAW Local 600 Hall, 10550 Dix, Dearborn.

Speakers will be Edward Welch, director of the state bureau of workers compensation, and Dr. Russell H. Reeves, a psychiatrist speaking on the emotional impact of injuries.

The meeting is open to the public. The group wants to educate injured workers on rights and responsibilities.

It also refer them to helping agencies and look out for the legislative interests.

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