

Hills: lone supporter in job program

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills officials are standing alone in their support of a troubled federally financed Oakland County jobs and training program.

Other mid- and southern-Oakland County communities, however, have filed a resolution of intent with Gov. James Blanchard to create a new South Oakland County Consortium to provide training and job placement.

A new service delivery area is supposed to include contiguous communities totaling 200,000 in population.

The catch is that the Job Training Partnership Act funds for our communities are administered through a department of Oakland County, which is not satisfying our needs," Robert Block, Southfield city administrator, said in a letter to Mayor Ben Mark.

If created, the new consortium would serve as a new service delivery area for southern Oakland County. The new delivery area would join the two existing county service delivery areas.

The delivery service program under attack is known as the Private Industry Council Balance of County. The remaining program serves the

Pontiac area. Money is distributed by the state on the basis of population, unemployment and number of disadvantaged people, said Kathleen Brang, an Oakland County program staff member.

THE MOVE to create a new service delivery area apparently has brewed for some time as participating communities and subcontractors, primarily school districts that provide training, have grown unhappy with the program's performance and administration.

The Job Training Partnership Act replaced the Comprehensive Employment Training Act that drew to a close in the early 1980s. The JTPA was enacted in 1983 and Oakland County programs began in 1984.

Some of the disgruntled subcontractors were on hand Monday to explain their position to the council. Complaints range from low performance ratings to the apparent lack of coordination with economic development to the loss of incentive money because of the program's poor statewide ranking.

Oakland County received approximately \$60,000 compared the program in the Monroe area that received \$193,000 in additional incentive money.

'We hope some conciliation can be brought about. We want some changes made.'

— Gloria Kennedy
Southfield community placement

"We hope some conciliation can be brought about," said Gloria Kennedy, Southfield community placement director. Southfield serves as agent for programs involving the Farmington area. "We want some changes made."

ACCORDING TO proponents, forming a new service delivery area would:

- Give local labor markets and local elected officials a voice in the program.
- Allow close coordination of JTPA with economic development efforts in southern Oakland County.
- Ensure all eligible south Oakland County residents and businesses full and equal benefits provided by JTPA.

The Farmington Hills City Council's decision to stick with the existing county program was not unusual. Three council members, Joe Alkateh, Jan Dolan and Terry Sever wanted to join other communities in sending the resolution to the governor.

Mayor Marks was joined by council members Jean Fox, Aldo Vagposki and Jody Soronen in giving the Oakland County program another chance to correct reported problems.

"This is the first time this has come out in the public that there's a problem with the county," Marks said. "I think they deserve the opportunity to make changes."

Other council members voiced similar opinions. "If it's a sensible system, we should improve what we've got rather than go with a new one," Fox said.

Soronen, who serves as a business representative on the private industry council, said she is concerned about creating a new service delivery area. A new program would add yet another layer of government, duplicate services and lessen the amount of money distributed among the county job training programs.

"AS WAS stated tonight, there are not new dollars," Soronen said. "You are talking about duplication of personnel."

Still, other council members disagreed. Yet they too, expressed

hope that the existing county program can be improved.

"I'm not afraid of making a change if the change is going to make us a more efficient program," Dolan said. As far as making changes in the existing program, she said, "without the pressure of creating a new program, I'm not sure it (changes) can be done."

Harold McKay, who runs the county program under fire, said the program serves people who, because of a lack of education or skills, are difficult to place and coordinate with economic development. That alone can affect the program's performance level ranking, he said.

"The people we serve have severe barriers to employment," McKay added.

A year ago, a minimum standard was set requiring that 40 percent of those trained should be placed in a job. "Only one public institution (a subcontractor) met that," McKay said.

"The problem is that some our subcontractors who were used to having the money, just don't have it," McKay continued, adding that performance is the key.

McKAY AND staff member Brang said other programs around the state aren't as involved with the

difficult to train. Consequently, their performance rating is better. Oakland County is rated as 25th out of 26 programs around the state.

The whole project is to get them off welfare and get them into a job," Brang said.

In response to complaints, changes are being made in the county program. For example, attempts are being made to reduce administrative costs and allow more of the federal money to be used for actual training, McKay said.

In a letter from the Walled Lake Consolidated Schools, one of the program's contractors, interim superintendent Barry Roseborough wrote:

"In the past 1 1/2 years, Oakland County has cut these program activities by 50 percent, although the program statistics show that the programs flowing directly to businesses meet five out of seven benchmarks set by the Department of Labor."

Contractors Monday expressed concern that the Oakland County program is increasingly failing to meet the labor department's benchmarks, though no one defined those benchmarks.

Farmington Public Schools superintendent Graham Lewis also sent a succinct letter in support of creating a new service delivery area.

MADD slates candlelight vigil

The Oakland County Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving will conduct a Candlelight Vigil on Monday, Dec. 14, at 7:30 p.m. at the Nardin Park Methodist Church in Farmington Hills on 11 Mile, one block west of Middlebelt.

The purpose of the vigil, according

to Greg Bien, Oakland County MADD president, is to provide a special setting in which family and friends may remember loved ones who have been killed by drunk drivers. The public is being invited to attend and support the victim families.

The Candlelight Vigil also begins a

period of "hope for a less violent future" for MADD as it sponsors other programs and projects during December to prevent holiday drunk driving crashes.

Among them is the "Red Ribbon Campaign" in which citizens are encouraged to tie a red ribbon to their left car door mirror or antenna as a sign to Oakland County that they hope for a safe holiday season and a stop to drunk driving.

"We hope that every citizen of Oakland County will join us in our holiday programs. The Candlelight Vigil is a great way to say I care to victims," Bien said.

For additional information or if you wish to have a name read at the vigil, call 333-3068.

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Senate amendment fails

An amendment to benefit area senior citizens narrowly missed passage in the state Senate by a 17-14 vote.

After meeting with senior renters, Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, offered an amendment to double the maximum limit on the homestead property tax credit they may claim.

The amendment would have increased the maximum to \$2,400 for those over 65 years old who may claim a special credit for the amount of rent that exceeds 40 percent of their household income.

Faxon said the amendment to SB 279 was a "means to move the current \$1,200 credit limit toward a reflection of the reality which has occurred, with rental increases in excess of 100 percent since the maximum limit was set in 1976."

"Many seniors who are on stable incomes have not been able to keep up with their rising rents and are being priced out of their apartments," he added.

The effort did not obtain the minimum 20 votes needed to amend a bill on third reading.

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