

Oakland plans suit for child-care funds

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Oakland County is preparing to sue the state for burdening it with \$800,000 in child-care costs.

A county board committee and a probate court official say the state violated the Headlee amendment of the Michigan Constitution by imposing a duty on the county without providing the grant to pay for it.

"The only way you'll make 'em sit up and take notice is to hit 'em over the head," said commissioner Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, a former state legislator.

"The Legislature has been dinking around with Headlee since it was passed," agreed commissioner Donald Jensen, R-Birmingham.

THE GENERAL government committee Monday gave 5-2 approval of a resolution authorizing the executive's budget department and corporation counsel to file suit against the state.

The proposal goes next to the full county board. Two committee Democrats voted no because the resolution authorizes the corporation counsel to hire an

outside firm to pursue the case.

"It's so cut-and-dried, why do we have to get a big name firm?" said commissioner Ruel McPherson, R-Hazel Park, in his dissent.

"There's nothing difficult about it (the case)," said commissioner Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park. "Anybody could do it. I could do it myself," said Aaron, an attorney.

The outside firm is Kuhl, Seest, Wardle, Lynch, Clark and Hampton, William Hampton is a former circuit judge and state legislator.

Supporting the resolution were Republicans Bishop, Jensen, chair-

man Richard Skarritt of Milford, Roy Rewald of Rochester and Democrat Lillian Jaffee Oaks of Southfield.

BASIS OF Oakland's complaint is an alleged state shortage of funds for a county budget item that was \$6 million in 1981 and \$8.4 million in 1986.

James Brennan, program evaluation specialist for the board, said a 1978 state law obligates the state to match 50 percent of the county's child-care-fund expenditures.

But the state "capped" its grants

and each year has shifted more and more costs to the county. He placed the total for six years at more than \$800,000 and the 1986 total alone at \$322,000.

Barbara Consiglio, probate court administrator, said Oakland officials had approached the Michigan Association of Counties (MAC) about filing a class action suit on behalf of all aggrieved counties, but other counties were reluctant to fight.

BRENNAN AND Consiglio said the Legislature in 1979 set up a Local Government Review Board to decide

the validity of claims from local units alleging violation of the Headlee amendment.

But they said the board had delayed claims because the panel itself was inadequately funded.

The 1978 Headlee amendment provides, among other things, that state government may not impose cost obligations on local units without providing the money to pay for them.

County officials say it's one of the most abused sections of the constitution because the Legislature constantly looks for ways to shift costs.

Faxon aid bill 'weighs' pupils

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Local school districts must wait another 10 days to see how state Sen. Jack Faxon's proposed "weighted" school aid formula will affect them.

"This raises the floor (base state aid) significantly for all without lowering the ceiling for any," said Faxon, D-Farmington Hills.

He revealed his formula, but not its specific effects, in a Lansing news conference last week. A computer printout showing the effect on every district is due the week of April 11, following the Legislature's spring break.

Other plans have raised the floor for poorer school districts but cut funds for the belt of "high tech" school districts stretching from Rochester to Ann Arbor. Suburban opposition to such aid plans could doom them.

"I think many in the Republican caucus will support this plan," said Faxon, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

ONE FUNDAMENTAL change of Senate Bill 795 would be to stop assigning state aid on the basis of counting each student as one.

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