

Inmates to pay increased costs

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Prisoners in the Oakland County Jail will soon be reminded of something folks on the outside already know — the cost of living is going up.

As approved by the finance committee of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners last week, affluent inmates will soon be paying more for room and board as well as medical attention.

Measures must be voted on by the full board — probably at Thursday's meeting — but resolutions approved by the finance committee call for:

- Increasing the maximum amount of reimbursement the county can seek from an inmate for custody and maintenance from \$30 to \$55 per day.
- Increasing the amount the county can collect from inmates holding jobs under work-release programs from \$10 per day to a maximum of \$30, depending on the prisoner's wages and circumstances.
- Charging inmates \$10 for each visit to the health clinic and \$7 per visit to the dental clinic. Visits to the health and dental clinics are currently free.

The changes could net the county almost \$100,000 per year, according to Sheriff John F. Nichols and Dale A. Cunningham, the manager of administrative services for the jail who appeared before the committee last Thursday.

NICHOLS EMPHASIZED the higher costs would only be for those inmates who have the means to pay. "And nobody will be

denied medical attention simply because they can't pay," he said.

But passing higher expenses along to inmates makes good sense, Nichols said. The per day cost of housing a prisoner has risen to nearly \$55.

The county can't collect from every inmate, he said, but some have considerable bank accounts or other assets on the outside.

The Oakland County Jail currently houses about 1,240 inmates, or about 120 less than maximum capacity.

Among them are 115 inmates — 108 men and 7 women — on work-release programs.

"We have a lot of people in different fields," said one jail official. "We have autoworkers, bakers, lawyers, physicians. You name it, we've got it."

UNDER NEW jail policies, they will be assessed daily maintenance and custody fees according to a sliding scale that takes into consideration the amount of money the inmate makes as well as other financial concerns, such as family obligations.

With one exception, collecting the fees may be difficult, Nichols said.

Visits to the health and dental clinics will be deducted from the inmate's commissary privileges, or the account he or she can draw against for incidental purchases like cigarettes, shaving cream and potato chips.

"The intent of this measure (fees for health and dental visits) is not necessarily to collect money," said Nichols. "The new fees are intended to discourage malingering (unnecessary sick calls)."

'Consent' splits local lawmakers

By Darrell Pressley
Staff writer

If the male state representatives had their way, the House would have a two-thirds majority to override Gov. James Blanchard's expected veto of a parental consent abortion control bill.

The bill passed Wednesday with 65 yes votes — seven short of a two-thirds majority.

Female representatives, however, gave the bill only 10 percent approval — of two of 20 women voted yes.

Both parties were split. Exactly half of the 60 Democrats voted yes; 25 of the 49 Republicans (71 percent) voted yes.

The House has 89 male members; 63 voted yes, 24 no and two were absent.

Of the 20 female members, two voted yes, 15 no and three were absent.

"It's a personal issue," said Rep. Lyn Banks, R-Livonia. "I hate having men decide."

Rep. Wilfred Webb, D-Hazel Park. Voting no were Lyn Banks, R-Livonia; Maxine Berman, D-Southfield; Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills; Judith Miller, R-Birmingham; and Gordon Sparks, R-Troy.

"This bill is one of the most mean-spirited pieces of legislation that has ever come before this legislature," said Berman, a spokesman for the opposition.

"How many parents would support this so-called parental consent law if they knew it placed children in abusive families at risk?"

"The truth is that this bill is meant

to put the squeeze on teenagers with no regard for the horrible alternatives they may seek," Berman said.

THE FACT THAT this bill would bring legislation into the family structure is a concern of some of the representatives.

"This is not a bill that supports the family," said Dolan. "We should not inflict this law that allows minors and judges to close out parents from participating in this important decision that their children face."

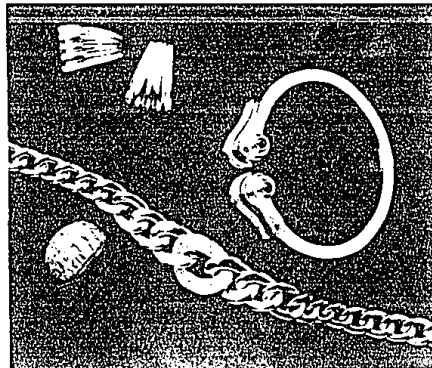
The parental consent bill could destroy what it seeks to strengthen —

family communication, said Rep. Miller. "This bill limits parents' rights."

"If this is not an anti-abortion bill, if this is really a 'pro family' bill, why is the word 'family' mentioned only once in the bill," said Rep. Berman. "While the word 'abortion' is mentioned 18 times?"

The House failed to get two-thirds approval to give the bill immediate effect. It goes now to the Senate, which passed a slightly different version.

Blanchard already has said he will veto it.



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