

Child welfare

Blanchard supports making it state agency

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The campaign to set up a child welfare agency as the 26th department of state government got a boost last week when Gov. James Blanchard threw his support behind it.

Blanchard and two key legislators — Sen. Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, and Rep. Teola Hunter, D-Detroit — signed an agreement to consolidate the 25 existing agencies that work on behalf of children.

"These bills may go forward," said a hesitant Sen. Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

"I have told Welborn we have to revisit the effect on Oakland County," said Nichols, who is sponsor of three bills in an 18-bill package.

THOSE BILLS are scheduled for a Senate vote Jan. 30. Other key lawmakers in major counties are also reported to have reservations on how the new depart-

ment would affect mental health and public health programs. Nichols said creating a new department "cuts across the jurisdictions of Social Services, mental health, community mental health services." That's why 18 bills are needed to establish the new department, which wouldn't be in place until 1995.

The Michigan Constitution, passed in 1963, required 132 existing state agencies to be consolidated into 20 departments.

The Legislature promptly created 19 departments but reserved one opening for future needs. Dozens of ideas have been floated in the last 25 years, but none has developed the broad political support that a "Children and Family Services Agency" is receiving.

"THE SOCIAL problems that children and families face are growing," said Blanchard. "We must do a more effective job

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R-Waterford

of using existing resources to help our children and families.

"The status quo is not acceptable. By combining and streamlining services, government can do a better job of helping our children lead better lives and ensuring a more productive society."

The first step, to be taken by 1991, would be to elevate the Office of

Children and Youth Services to an autonomous agency within the Department of Social Services.

Next, several voluntary pilot projects would be launched to combine state and local services, Blanchard said.

Said Welborn in a joint news conference: "This agreement puts light at the end of the tunnel."

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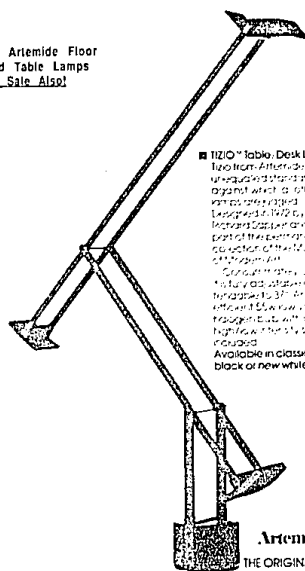
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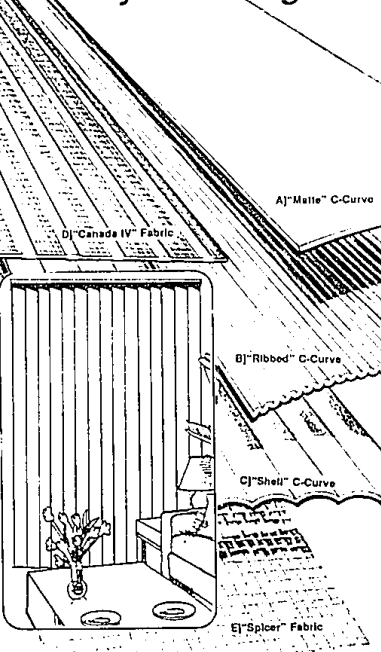
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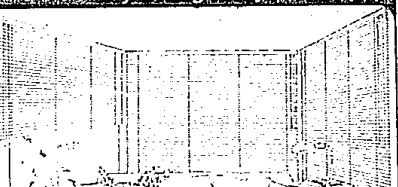
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30" x 64"	17.88	43" x 64"	25.88		
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