

Bill seeks 'drug free' school zones

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By Tim Richard
staff writer

The Michigan Senate last week passed bills to make schools safer from drugs and update school bus safety rules.

For law-abiding drivers, it means they will stop 20 feet from a school bus with flashing lights instead of 10.

"We're not going to tolerate drug tampering with our children," said the sponsor of the drug-free zone bill, Sen. Fred Dillingham, R-Fowlerville.

"This started as a drug-free school bill, but it became a drug-free zone bill," he said. His Senate Bill 553 was amended to cover public parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, youth centers and even video arcades.

All Observer & Eccentric area senators supported the bills, which go to the House.

THE DRUG bill increases penal-

ties for dealers who invade the drug-free zones.

"It's a tiered approach. There are three times the normal penalties for drug distributors," said Dillingham.

For this reason, he worries about that House Judiciary Chair Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, may frown on the Senate bill. Bullard usually criticizes bills calling for putting more people in prisons for lengthening sentences.

"But the penalties are not mandatory," Dillingham said, adding it may make the bills more palatable to the House. "The judge has increased discretion based on the crime."

SB 533 was approved 34-0.

THE SCHOOL bus code is contained in three bills sponsored by Dillingham and Richard Fessler, R-Commerce.

"It's a total, comprehensive compilation of bus safety rules — a one-

stop shopping center for people concerned about school bus safety," Dillingham told the Senate.

"Currently there are several laws, conflicting rules and attorney general opinions covering school buses."

Among the changes Dillingham cited:

- Beginning drivers will have to complete a course, and all must take six hours of continuing education every two years. Currently, a new driver has a year to complete the course. The state will pay for training, estimated roughly at several million dollars.

- There is a uniform system of four red and four yellow flashing lights.

- A new mirror system will enable the driver to better see passengers they have discharged. Sponsors told of children being killed by buses when they stooped to pick up articles and couldn't be seen by drivers.

- State Police will inspect all

school transportation vehicles, not just buses.

The bills passed 32-0. They are the barred, meaning all must pass for any one to take effect.

FESSLER INSERTED an amendment for the state to study the feasibility of a right-side discharge rule. If adopted, it would prohibit drivers from discharging passengers who had to cross the road to the left of the bus.

The rule would raise transportation costs and lengthen children's bus rides. But proponents say it would save school districts millions in lawsuits.

Fessler's Transportation Committee received a late proposal that the state require "pusher" or rear engines on school buses. Such buses would have no hoods that would cause blind spots for drivers. The proposal surfaced too late in deliberations for action.

SMILE eases process

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THE PROGRAM "was extremely helpful in going through a divorce is traumatic, especially when you have a very young child," said one participant, the mother of an 18-month-old toddler. "You know they're hurting, but you don't know why. But now, through this program, I understand and I know what to expect in the future."

Ann Kitzmiller, the mother of two young children, agreed the workshop was helpful. But she said she would like to see it offered earlier in the divorce process.

There "would be a lot of benefit to the person who files to know what it (divorce) does to the children — it could even be preventive," Kitzmiller explained. "If the divorce does continue, then at least there can be some friendly terms."

For the March and April SMILE seminars, recently divorced parents with minor children in Oakland County received an invitation to attend the program. But based on the comments from Kitzmiller and several other participants, the timing of the invitation is being changed.

"Effective this May, people will be invited once the divorce is started, as opposed to once it's over," Victor explained. "Once someone files for divorce, both parents will receive a letter signed by the judge who is assigned to their case, inviting them to participate in the program. We want to encourage them to help their children better deal with the reality of divorce."

A FAMILY PRACTICE attorney for 15 years, Victor said he is excited by the opportunity to offer this service. In the future, the program may be opened to the public, making it available in some form throughout the state and designing a workshop for children.

"The American family is changing, and we have to deal with those changes," he said. "This program can make the children's lives and the lives of the American family much more positive."

Sosnick agrees. "What we're trying to do, if the parents can't get back together, is to help them at least be friends," he explained. "We're giving them some tools to help."

Judge aims for easy court atmosphere

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HE HAS ADOPTED the motto of Sis Wenger, the Birmingham-based director of community education for Maplegrove Chemical Abuse Center of Henry Ford Hospital, by his philosophy: "It doesn't take the whole

world to change the whole world."

Sosnick, in the second year of his six-year term as a circuit judge, is grateful for the job.

"I feel like it's a gift to be here, because I don't feel like I'll last too long."

"It's also a lonely job — God! Is it

lonely, because you're out on a limb a lot, in making decisions. But, that comes with the territory."

LONG-TIME FRIEND Bernard Friedman, now a U.S. District Judge in Detroit, characterized Sosnick as

a conscientious judge who "really loves people, and wants to do a great job on the bench."

"Everything nice is all I can say about him."

But since he has been on the bench, Sosnick said he has had a lot of time to think.

"Across the whole country we're raising a lot of people who have a low self-esteem. We have to help them feel good about themselves so they stop doing evil things."

How to help abandoned animals:

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baby. If you are uncertain about what you are doing, call a veterinarian.

• From any pet store or veterinarian, you can get Esbilac Power or liquid. That should be mixed with bottled spring water and baby vitamins that do not contain iron. Rac-

coons must be fed with an oral syringe, pet nurse or baby bottle. Squirrels can only be fed with an oral syringe.

Healthy baby animals can be fed every 2-4 hours. It usually takes 1-2 days and several tries before the baby animals become accustomed to a new way of getting fed and new-

tasting food, Cornell said.

Baby animals must have their bellies rubbed with a warm cloth to help them eliminate wastes. This must be done after every feeding until their eyes open. Raccoon eyes open 18-24 days of age and squirrels, 35-42 days of age.

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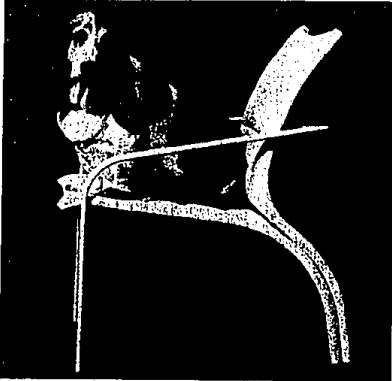
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