

Shelter gets funds from state

The South Oakland Shelter is among 66 Michigan homeless shelters getting more than \$3.5 million in state and federal subsidies this year.

SOS, which moves its shelter service around to various area

churches, will receive \$19,750. "Today's grants are important because no one in Michigan should ever have to go without a bed, a meal or other emergency assistance," said Gov. John Engler when he made the announcement.

Local lawmaker high on health care discipline issue

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Tougher regulations for fewer lawsuits against health care professionals.

That's the deal shaping up between the House and Senate in an effort to curb the outflow of doctors from Michigan.

"We're streamlining the process of licensing and discipline for licensed health care workers," said Rep. John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Township.

Jamian and Rep. David Gubow, D-Oak Park, together chair the House Public Health Committee. They produced eight license and discipline bills which the House passed recently by votes ranging from 99 to 1,030.

Jamian sponsored the bill to create the "impaired provider" program into which professionals with drug, alcohol or mental problems can be steered for treatment.

Tort bill hit

Meanwhile, the Senate has passed SB 270 to reform medical liability laws. But a long development when the House Judiciary Committee amended that bill to allow costlier lawsuits.

Spencer Johnson, spokesman for the Michigan Hospital Association, called the House version of the liability bill "grossly inadequate" because it:

■ Falls to limit non-economic

LANSING

("pain and suffering") awards by allowing "overly broad" exceptions to those limits.

■ Inserts a sliding scale for attorney fees that rewards plaintiffs' attorneys for pushing litigation rather than settling.

The hospital association is joined by the Farm Bureau, Michigan Chamber of Commerce and physicians in seeking the tort reform bill.

"I feel it's been watered down," agreed Jamian, who said he would seek floor amendments to SB 270 to bring it closer to the Senate version.

"They go hand in hand," Jamian said.

Faster procedures

The process of limiting the license of a bad doctor will be speeded up to one year from the current two or three years, Jamian said.

"There's a requirement that courts must report convictions of licensed health care professionals to the Department of Commerce (which handles licensing)," he added.

"What's really nice is that there will be more public membership on discipline boards. So the discipline process is a public process, not one behind closed doors."

Two of the bills exempt part of the discipline process from the Open Meetings and Freedom of Information Act. But Jamian said those exceptions apply to the early stages of the complaint process, when regulators are deciding whether to send a case to the discipline or the revocation process.

The bills cover medical doctors, chiropractors, nurses, optometrists, osteopaths, pharmacists, physical therapists, podiatrists, counselors, psychologists, occupational therapists, sanitarians and veterinarians.

The measures are House Bills 4076 through 80, HB 4289, 4290, 4292 and 4295.

One bill allows complaints against foreign doctors with accents so thick that patients can't understand them. "There's a mechanism to let the patient go directly to the medical board so the board can ask the doctor to go to an accent reduction program," Jamian said.

Another would allow appeals to go directly to the Court of Appeals, bypassing the circuit courts.

Medical professionals will pay higher license fees to fund the program.

Trial courts will be required to report to regulators the convictions of health care professionals for felonies or misdemeanors involving drugs or alcohol.

County consolidates departments

Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn is doing his part to stem the flow of red ink in the cash-strapped county government.

Kuhn intends very soon for the drain office to take over the Water and Sewage Operations, Division of the Department of Public Works.

The move would transfer 137 employees and a \$5.7-million budget from public works to the drain office and reduce expenses by \$384,000 to \$608,000 because duplicated services would be eliminated, Kuhn said. The number of drain office employees would be reduced through attrition.

Public works director Dave Ross would be left with two divisions, Facilities Engineering and Maintenance & Operations.

The county commission was scheduled to consider Kuhn's recommendation and hold a public hearing at its meeting today.

Kuhn has lobbied for such a change since he became drain commissioner in 1972, but former county executive Dan Murphy always opposed it. Murphy's replacement, L. Brooks Patterson, likes the idea and said during the campaign last year that he'd like to see it done.

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