

Judges send folks to Clinton Valley

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STAFF WRITER

The following article is the second in a series on the Oakland County Probate Court that rules on many important aspects of people's lives, from sentencing juvenile delinquents to granting name changes and guardianships to committing people to state hospitals.

Once every four weeks each Oakland County Probate Court judge is scheduled to commit mentally-ill people to the Clinton Valley Center state mental hospital.

That may seem an enormous burden to bear for the judges, shipping folks off to a mental institution, but most cases clearly require psychiatric care of some sort, said Judge Eugene Arthur Moore. Moore presided over mental hearings last month.

Generally, people are ordered before a probate judge because a family member or friend has filed a petition with the court to have the person in question committed. Occasionally the police file the petition.

This was the case Feb. 28, when Pontiac police officer Ed Ketzler testified in the case of a Pontiac woman.

Ketzler responded Feb. 19 to a civil dispute at the woman's house. "She was loud," he said. "She said her name was United Nations. She said she wanted to make a citizens arrest of myself and my partner."

Furthermore, the woman tried to telephone Selfridge Air National Guard Base to call in an air strike on the police officers, Ketzler said. "She threw the phone at my partner and tried to burn him with a cigarette. She ran across the front lawn screaming at me and jumped on me."

Moore sent the woman to Clinton Valley for up to 60 days followed by 30 days of out-patient care.

Another case that day involved a teenage girl who petitioned the court to be released from Fairlawn Center, an adjunct to Clinton Valley for minors.

Fairlawn staff psychiatrist Kakkashan Chowdhri testified the girl hears her teddy bears speaking. "She hears the voices coming from the teddy bears to hurt herself, to kill herself. Most of the time (what the teddy bears say) is related to her self esteem, that she isn't good looking (and) is a bad person."

The defense attorney asked Chowdhri if the teddy bears say anything positive to the girl. Very little, was the answer.

Moore ordered continued hospitalization of the girl, then bid goodbye to the girl's parents. "Thank you both," he said. "Good luck to you."

In a private interview, Moore said "the most pitiful thing to me" is that in many cases the families don't show up at mental health hearings. With physical ailments, it seems, people willingly support the injured party, Moore said. Family and friends tend to eschew mentally ill people.

A third case involved a woman who stabbed her neighbor and has been a patient at Clinton Valley since 1979. Staff psychiatrist Domingo Enriquez testified the woman has paranoid schizophrenia and "thinks the staff of the hospital goes to her house and goes through her clothes. She thinks someone removes thoughts from her head with a word processor."

Furthermore, Enriquez said, "She says there's nothing wrong with her and she's ready to live independently. All she needs to do is drink Diet Cherry Coke" in lieu of medication.

Moore asked the hospital to see where else

this woman might be placed, perhaps in an adult foster care home.

Although it might seem the probate judges are engaged in arbitrarily committing people to mental hospitals, they must follow specific guidelines.

For people who appear in probate court for the first time, judges must limit their commitment order to 60 days in a mental hospital. The second time an individual comes before the judge he or she may get 90 days. The third time a judge can order an indefinite stay in Clinton Valley, subject to review every six months.

Moore laments that "some of the people we see have been here 10 or 15 times." He lays the blame for that on "very poor supportive services in Oakland County. The real need is to provide better after-care."

Moore heard six cases on Feb. 28, each resulting in a Clinton Valley or Fairlawn stay. The county was represented by corporation counsel attorney John Ross. Court appointed attorneys represented all of the mentally ill people, which is common as most of them come from low-income families, Moore said.

Moore, 58, has been listening to these stories and rendering decisions for 26 years on the Oakland County Probate Court.

With about 5,000 cases per judge per year, the court is one of the busiest of its kind in the country.

In addition to their mental health duties, the probate judges — Moore, Barry Grant, Joan Young and chief judge Sandra Silver — preside over guardianship, conservatorship and name-change requests.

The judges also hear cases involving minors who commit crimes, which will be the subject of the next installment of this series on the probate court.

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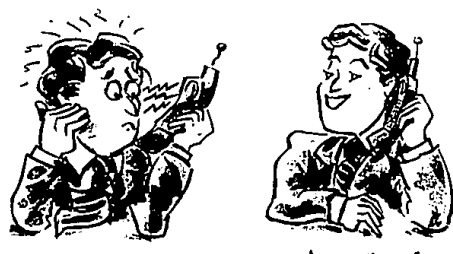
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