

HOUSE REPORT

CAPITOL CAPSULES

The court reform movement thickens.

Sen. William VanRegenmorter, R-Hudsonville, is proposing a substitute for House Bill 5156, the court reform measure passed by the House.

VanRegenmorter, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, provides for a "Family Court" that will handle divorce, child custody, support, paternity, juvenile delinquency, child protective proceedings, adoption and mental health guardianships.

Currently, some cases are handled by circuit courts, others by probate court. Under the VanRegenmorter substitute, Family Court would be a division of circuit court. He said his proposal would also provide more equitable state funding of courts.

HB 5156, drafted by House Judiciary chair Michael Nye, R-Litchfield, provides for spreading the duties of courts between the three levels of trial courts — circuit, probate and district, blurring the distinctions between them. A companion measure would abolish the constitutional requirement that every county maintain a probate court.

Bottom line in both proposals: Spread judicial resources more evenly, have more flexibility in assigning judges, and reduce the need for more judgeships.

VOTE ON SUICIDE

Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, says voters should be allowed to decide the question of legalizing assisted suicide.

He is pushing an amendment to the so-called "Death with Dignity" package of bills requiring certain treatment options be made available to terminally ill patients. If his amendment is adopted, Senate Bill 980 would make assisted suicide an option if voters approve it. It's in the Senate Committee on Families, Mental Health and Human Services.

"Unfortunately, the assisted suicide debate has been dominated up to this point by a few sensational criminal trials," said Peters. "But it's not about Jack Kevorkian. It's about whether the people of Michigan will have the right to be treated on their deathbed as they wish."

OPEN THE LIST

The state Senate has passed a bill to allow public access to the records of sex offenders in their community. The measure now goes to the House.

The sponsor, Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, the public could request and receive information regarding the sex offender's name, conviction, age, physical description and current zip code.

Under the 1994 Sex Offender Registry Act, local law enforcement agencies are told each time a sex offender is released and relocated to that community.

"The bill is similar to a bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives," Bouchard said. "The so-called 'Megan Law' — named for a little girl from New Jersey who was killed by a known sex offender living in her neighborhood — seeks to protect the most vulnerable among us, our children."

SAME-SEX FALLOUT

"Same-sex marriages" aren't just a Hawaiian issue. Every state — including Michigan — could be affected if the Hawaiian Supreme Court rules that a state law prohibiting homosexual and

lesbian marriages violates the state constitution, says Rep. Deborah Whyman, R-Canton.

"If Hawaii permits same sex marriages, every state would then be forced to recognize these unions under the 'full faith and credit' clause of the U.S. Constitution," Whyman told a House Judiciary subcommittee in Lansing last week.

The second-term lawmaker is author of House Bill 5561, to prohibit same-sex marriages in Michigan, and HB 5562, to nullify a same-sex marriage that may be legal in another state.

LAW LAUDED

State Rep. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, was honored as "legislator of the year" by the Michigan Society for Human Resource Management for sponsoring a law to limit civil liability of employers that provide good-faith job references.

"We are grateful that the House, Senate and Gov. Engler unanimously support House Bill 5137 and recognize the inherent problems faced by employers and employees with reference checking," said Arlie C. Skory, state director of the HRM group. HRM has 2,000 professional and stu-

dent members. Law faces a primary challenge from Gerald

Verna, the man he ousted in the 1994 primary.

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