

County board refunds grand jury

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Funding for the Oakland County Grand Jury has been tentatively approved for the remainder of 1996, with commissioners fully aware recent deaths involving Dr. Jack Kevorkian may be reviewed.

It's admittedly premature to speculate whether the grand jury may look at the two most recent deaths at which Kevorkian was present, said commissioner Sue Ann Douglas, R-Rochester.

"But our approval of funding (for the grand jury) did not have any restrictions," said Douglas, chair of the county board's Finance Committee that on Thursday approved financing the grand jury through the remainder of the year.

Without mentioning any specific case that might be brought before the grand jury, the committee unanimously approved transferring \$20,000 from the board's contingency fund for the grand jury, said Douglas. The committee also agreed to provide \$30,000 later.

Without the transfer, said Douglas, the grand jury would have run out of funding on June 30.

The motion to provide funding was scheduled to be reviewed by the entire Board of Commissioners, possibly at this week's meeting Thursday.

Commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham and a member of the finance committee, said the vote was to approve funding with no restrictions. It's not the function of county commissioners to restrict the activity of the Oakland County prosecu-

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Dan Devine
—county commissioner

tor or the grand jury, he said.

"Enforcing the law is his (Prosecutor Richard Thompson's) responsibility," Jensen said. "It's the responsibility of commissioners to provide the prosecutor with the tools for effective law enforcement and allow him to use his discretion."

Neither Kevorkian's name nor the most recent deaths—the latest being a Columbus, Ohio woman whose body was left at Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital late Thursday—were mentioned during the finance committee meeting, said Douglas.

"But Kevorkian came up Monday," she said, referring to the caucus of Republican commissioners earlier in the week.

At that caucus, several Republican commissioners asked the prosecutor for assurances the grand jury would not be used to indict Kevorkian. Commissioner Dan Devine Jr., R-Bloomfield Hills, said commissioners have a responsibility to oversee the prosecutor's budget.

Thompson—who previously said he believes he has a professional duty to enforce the state common law against assisted suicide—responded by saying

the grand jury could only be used to investigate unsolved homicides and drug cases.

That may seem to exclude the grand jury being used against Kevorkian, said Devine. "But remember, the medical examiner has (in previous assisted suicides) classified the manner of death as homicide," said the commissioner, "that may keep the door open."

Devine emphasized that he did not want to restrict the prosecutor. But a state law passed within the last year gives the prosecutor the authority to subpoena witnesses and compel them to testify.

"I think the grand jury is valid on cases under investigation where the target person is not known until there is sufficient evidence to indict," said Devine. "In this instance, Kevorkian is clearly the target and there's no reason to keep the investigation secret... or at least no reason that I'm aware of."

The credibility of the grand jury process may be at risk, Devine said.

But other commissioners suggested that asking the prosecutor to appear at the caucus—officially to discuss the cost of two lengthy trials earlier this year with Kevorkian as the defendant—may have political overtones.

Devine, however, said his interest is budgetary, not political.

"A number of constituents have been asking about the cost of prosecuting Kevorkian," said the commissioner, who has endorsed Thompson's opponent in the Aug. 6 Republican primary, David G. Gorcey.

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School's out and summer is bursting with reasons for celebration...weddings... reunions... Fourth of July fireworks... vacations. As an educator, however, the celebrations I enjoy above all others are high school graduations.

Graduation ceremonies are occasions for feeling proud one minute and totally insecure the next, for reminiscing, for sharing a laugh or shedding a few tears. Graduations are times for farewells and times for new beginnings.

This June more than 85,000 high school seniors across Michigan are throwing their caps in the air in an exuberant salute to their own accomplishments. Their pride is well-earned because these young women and men have made a serious investment in their futures. By completing their high school education, they have set themselves up to win.

Every one of these graduates deserves a large round of applause, for they have mastered many skills, social as well as academic, during their K-12 years. They will think back, remembering the many individuals who made a difference in their lives and brought them to this proud moment of passage. Not only teachers, but also custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, maintenance and security personnel, food service workers, school nurses and para-professionals—all the public school employees make our children's education, health, safety and well-being their top priorities.

Administrators and school board members take great pride in seeing their students succeed, as do the business community members who

volunteer their time and resources to public education in a variety of important ways such as school-to-work and mentoring programs.

But, as any teacher will tell you, aside from the student's personal drive to succeed, the single most essential ingredient for student success is parental involvement.

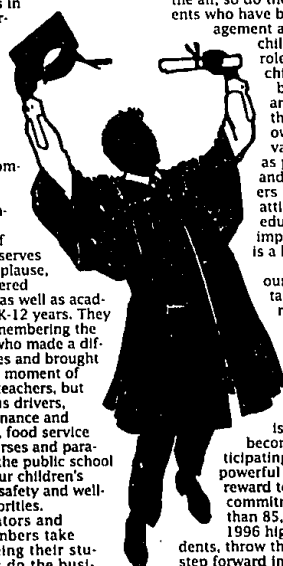
As those mortarboards fly up in the air, so do the hearts of all those parents who have been providing encouragement and support to their children: taking an active role in making sure their child's school delivers the best possible education; and above all, showing their children by their own example that they value learning. After all, as parents we're the first and most important teachers in our child's world—our attitudes and actions about education make a lifelong impression. And education is a lifelong process.

It is our privilege and our obligation to make certain that every child, regardless of circumstances, has access to a quality education. It's our responsibility, and that of future generations, to give our children the emotional and intellectual nourishment they need to become strong citizens, participating in a flourishing and powerful democracy. And it's our reward to enjoy the results of our commitment—cheering as more than 85,000 winners, Michigan's 1996 high school graduating students, throw their hats in the air and step forward into a bright future.

Because when they win, we all win.



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