

Mental hospitals suffer under state's budget, says Johnson

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

To Rep. Shirley Johnson, the Community Health Budget was a cruel joke on patients at three state mental hospitals.

"A travesty," said Johnson, R-Royal Oak, a nine-term lawmaker who has served all but one of those terms on the budget-writing Appropriations Committee.

On paper it looked as if both chambers of the Legislature voted July 7 to keep open Detroit Psychiatric Clinic, Clinton Valley Center and Pontiac and Pheasant Ridge at Kalamazoo.

"A lot of vulnerable people will believe they have won something they haven't," said Johnson.

The (majority) Democrats created a situation where the governor can use his line-item veto (to remove the funding). It was never part of their (Democrats') agenda," she said.

Instead, the Legislature opened the \$7.3 billion appropriations bill Gov. John Engler's line-item veto. Here are the political mechanics.

Closing the three mental health units was in Engler's proposed budget. The GOP-run Sen-

ate agreed, but the Democratic run-House last month restored funding.

So the bill went to a joint House-Senate conference committee, which agreed to put in \$50 million for the three hospitals plus a developmentally disabled program at Caro hospital, but, as Johnson said, exposed the funding to Engler's line-item veto.

The Senate July 7, at the urging of Sen. Robert Cierko, R-Northville, approved the bill 37-0 with no debate. "It's a good conference report," said Genko. He agreed that Engler probably will veto the line items, not only because he wants to close the facilities but because they exceed budget targets.

The House vote was 66-35 with nine absent.

"I visited those facilities," said Rep. Nancy Cassia, R-Novi, a former school psychologist for 17 years. "I walked the corridors of DPL. It's outdated. At Kalamazoo, there were a couple of handfuls of kids. Hawthorn, in our area (Northville Township), could provide quality care."

Cassia agreed Engler probably will use the line-item veto.

But Rep. Nick Ciaramitaro, D-Roseville, considered the bill a triple victory. One reason was providing funding for the three hospitals.

A second reason is that \$512,500 was kept in for the Health Michigan Fund, adding new cancer, kidney, osteoporosis and brain injury programs.

A third reason is that the bill's language tells the governor to seek a waiver from a federal rule that says federal funds for psychiatric patients will flow only when those patients are in "general" hospitals. "It's cheaper for the state to put them in general hospitals, but more expensive for the taxpayer," Ciaramitaro said.

Ciaramitaro was House leader on the conference committee as Genko was the Senate leader.

Here is how local lawmakers voted:

YES - Penny Crissman, R-Rochester, Patricia Godchaux, R-Birmingham, Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield.

NO - Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, Johnson, Tom Middleton, R-Ortonville, Andrew Ruczkowski, R-Farmington Hills.

Here is Engler's plan, as revealed in his February budget message.

■ Detroit Psychiatric Clinic - Engler wants to close and consolidate it with Northville Regional Psychiatric Hospital. Lawmakers voted \$17.7 million to keep DPL open.

■ Clinton Valley Center - Engler wants to close and consolidate it with a unit at Caro in the Thumb. Lawmakers voted \$3.2 million to keep it open.

■ Pheasant Ridge Children's Program at Kalamazoo - Engler wants to close it and consolidate it with Hawthorn Center in Northville Township. Lawmakers voted \$4.1 million to keep it open.

project at Oakland University.

The state's fiscal year begins Oct. 1, but the school year started July 1, with the bulk of expenditures kicking in with the start of classes around Labor Day. Lawmakers authorized \$95 million in "advance" to be paid in August and September.

The Senate version pumped \$1 million into job training grants for public school academics, the so-called "charter schools." But the House-Senate conference committee stripped out that line.

Here is a breakdown of school aid figures for fiscal 1997-8: All Oakland districts will get \$154 more per pupil. The new totals, rounded to the nearest dollar (with percentage increase in parentheses), are:

Birmingham \$10,839 (1.4).
Southfield \$9,921 (1.6).
Avondale \$7,226 (2.2).
Bloomfield Hills \$10,916 (1.4).
Oxford \$5,920 (2.7).
Troy \$7,996 (2).
West Bloomfield \$7,648 (2).
Clarkston \$5,908 (2.7).
Farmington \$9,029 (1.7).
Lake Orion \$6,721 (2.3).
Rochester \$6,768 (2.3).
Walled Lake \$7,415 (2.1).

Facility's fate draws activism

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

With the fate of three state hospitals - including Clinton Valley Center in Pontiac - pending before Gov. John Engler, advocates for the facilities are going on the offensive.

Newspaper ads running this week urge the governor to continue funding for Clinton Valley Center (CVC), the Detroit Psychiatric Institute and the Pheasant Ridge Children's Center in Kalamazoo.

"Call the Governor TODAY at 617-373-3400, or fax (517) 335-6863 (sic)," state the ads sponsored by the Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Michigan; the Mental Health Association of Michigan; the Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders; AFSCME Council 25, and UAW Local 600.

"We're trying to make people aware of what's happening," said Hope Cummins, president of the Oakland Chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill. "And we want to show the governor there's a lot of people who need all three of these facilities."

Funding for the hospitals was included in the \$7.3 billion Community Health Budget approved last week by the House and the Senate. It includes \$33 million for CVC, \$18 million for Detroit Psychiatric and \$3 million for Pheasant Ridge to fund the facilities for fiscal 1998.

Lawmakers included money for the hospitals with full knowledge the governor would likely use his line-item veto to reject the funding. Engler announced he wanted to close the three hospitals as part of a cost-cutting move last October.

The governor hasn't received the budget, his office said Tuesday. "Once he does get the budget, he will have two weeks to act on it," said spokesperson Geraldyn Lasher.

While the governor hasn't acted on the budget, the director of the Michigan Department of Community Health has urged

Engler to veto funding for the three hospitals, Lasher said.

"If funding for these hospitals is included in the budget, services to local communities would have to be cut," she said, referring to the message community health director James K. Haveman sent to the governor.

Closing Clinton Valley poses a problem for local officials, including county commissioners Fran Amos, R-Waterford. They agree CVC is old, inefficient and too expensive to maintain.

The massive facility on Elizabeth Lake Road near the Oakland County Court Complex was built in the 1970s to house more than 500 patients. "The kitchen is the size of a football field," said county commissioner Amos.

CVC currently houses 186 patients - down from 316 last year - including 65 Oakland County residents.

If CVC is closed, local advocates ask, what would happen to those people?

Some could be transferred to group homes, said Sandra M. Lindsey, director of Oakland County Community Mental Health Services. "We're working on that," she said Tuesday.

But more serious patients would have to be transferred to other state hospitals, she said, with the most likely facility being in Caro. "We don't think Oakland families with loved ones in Clinton Valley should be forced to travel two hours (to Caro) to see their loved ones," Lindsey said.

Families with patients at Pheasant Ridge and Detroit Psychiatric voice similar complaints. Patients at those facilities would most likely be transferred to state hospitals in Northville, according to Cummins. "It's not fair to make those families travel long distances to see their loved ones."

The Alliance advocates a series of smaller, more cost-efficient mental hospitals located throughout the state.

Officials eye Fairlawn for treating, care of patients

While many of Oakland County's Republican commissioners support Gov. Engler's plan to close Clinton Valley Hospital, they disagree strongly about where patients should be transferred, if the 117-year-old facility is terminated as expected.

"We know CVC is simply too expensive to operate," said commissioner Fran Amos, R-Waterford. "But we have some ideas about another facility in Oakland County if CVC is closed."

The Public Services Committee of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners last week approved a resolution calling for the now vacant Fairlawn Center to be converted to a mental health facility.

"It's a perfectly good facility that could be used to house patients from Oakland, Macomb and other parts of southeast Michigan," said commissioner Shelley G. Taub, R-Bloomfield Hills.

Taub and others, however, are concerned the state has some plans of its own for the 140-bed facility that was closed last year. State officials envision Fairlawn as a regional detention center for juvenile offenders.

Why should a local facility be used regionally when it's more perfectly suited for a mental health facility for area patients, they ask.

"Fairlawn would be a perfect mental health facility," said Hope Cummins, president of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Oakland County.

— By Pat Murphy

State school aid rises

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Public schools will see their special education funds tripled over their per-pupil allotments raised 2.9 percent under the Legislature's new school aid act.

Lawmakers last week approved a \$9.24 billion budget that was \$50 million more than requested by Gov. John Engler and an overall 7 percent boost.

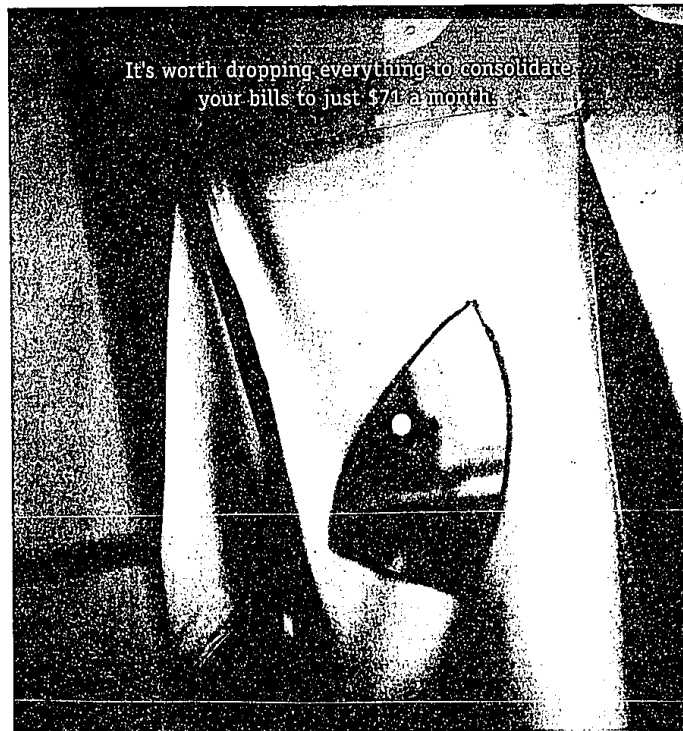
The big change came in the wake of a state Supreme Court decision that state government for 17 years has short-changed 84 suburban school districts on special education.

The budget bill hiked special ed from the current \$273.6 million to \$762 million. There was no breakdown on which districts will get how much. The high court is still receiving legal briefs on how monetary awards should be made.

House Democrats once again gave up on their effort to raise adult education funding back to \$185 million. They settled for Engler's \$80 million.

Lawmakers boosted math-science center funding to a total of \$8.2 million, including a math

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