

A warm squeeze



Helping others: Bloomfield Township resident Mirella Panozzo hopes to help Mark Fillipi, age 4, of Clinton Township, in his fight against leukemia by running in the 26.2-mile Honolulu Marathon. Proceeds from a recent fund-raiser she hosted will go to the Leukemia Society of America and Mark, not to fund her trip to Honolulu as reported last week.

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Here and there in the prison business:

State Sens. William VanRegenmorter and Mike Rogers have unveiled their plans for modifying the so-called "650 drug lifer" law.

The harshest in the nation, Michigan's law requires a life sentence in prison without hope of parole for anyone convicted of dealing in 650 grams (2.2 pounds) of drugs. Aimed at nailing drug kingpins, it has instead resulted in life terms for many young "mules" on first conviction.

VanRegenmorter, R-Jenison, has reported from the Judiciary Committee his Senate Bill 280 which would:

- Make a convicted person eligible for parole after 15 years if he or she cooperated with law enforcement officials, had no convictions in the previous 10 years for a violent felony, had no drug violation worth four years in prison, and wasn't part of an organized drug gang; provided the sentencing judge (or his or her successor) had no objection to parole.

- Make parole available for persons already serving 650-lifer terms.

- Allow a 25-year prison term as an alternative to life for a person convicted of possession of 650 grams or more.

- Decrease from 25 to 20 years the minimum alternative sentence for a juvenile convicted as an adult for possession of 650 grams or more.

- Reduce mandatory minimum sentences in several kinds of cases. For delivery or possession of 225 to less than 650 grams, the minimum would be reduced from 20 to 10 years. For delivery of 50 to 225 grams, the term would be cut from 10 years to five. The one-year minimum for delivery of less than 50 grams, and for possession of 25 to 60 grams, would be deleted.

- Eliminate a sentencing judge's ability to depart from mandatory minimum sentences

for "substantial and compelling reasons" for offenses involving less than 650 grams; and provide that the mandatory minimum wouldn't apply if the defendant cooperated with authorities.

Currently, 160 persons are serving mandatory life sentences for delivery of 650 grams or more.

Rogers, R-Brighton, is sponsor of a companion measure, SB 281, amends the Department of Corrections law to allow paroles under SB 280, which amends the Public Health Code. SB 280 and 281 are "tie-barred," which means that both must be passed for either to become law.

The bills are on the Senate calendar, and some action is expected before the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the House Judiciary Committee has amended a "date rape" drug bill by Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Redford, to modify the drug lifer law. Bankes' bill is sitting on the House calendar.

Post for Geake

Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, has been appointed to the 19-member Michigan Sentencing Commission by Senate majority leader Dick Posthumus.

Geake has worked on the Department of Corrections budget on the Appropriations Committee and on crime issues as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Posthumus, R-Alto.

"The Sentencing Commission was created by law to develop and recommend sentencing guidelines for judges that are uniformly applied throughout the state," Geake said.

Geake said the Senate this fall will consider using any new prison construction projects as pilots for "privatization."

Registry bill up

The Senate is scheduled to consider an amendment by Mike Bouchard, R-Birmingham, to the Sex Offenders Registration Act. It sets up a procedure to verify the address of a released offend-

er. Bouchard's SB 669 would require the State Police on the 15th of each month to mail a verification form to each person registered under the act to verify his address. The person would have five days to reply.

If enacted, the bill would require State Police to send out 214,000 pieces of mail each year. The bill says the registrant would have to pay mailing costs,

but the Senate Fiscal Agency noted "there is no method prescribed in the bill for this to be done."

If the offender failed to reply for two months or the address turned out to be wrong, State Police would have to investigate and inform local police. Local sheriffs and police departments would be "encouraged" to verify addresses, check compliance and report errors to the state.

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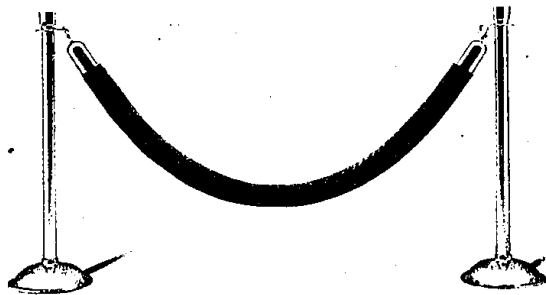
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