

Bill package would crack down on Michigan's drunken drivers

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Tough on drunks

If "tough new laws" could stop drunk and unlicensed drivers, then the Michigan House of Representatives may have 10 bills that will prevent an estimated 644 road deaths per year.

Later in the session, the House passed a bipartisan package that in part, will:

- Permit "boots" and other immobilizing devices to be placed on the vehicles of convicted first-time drunken drivers. They require immobilization for 14 days for a second drunk offense and six months for a third suspended-license offense. Sponsor of HB 4961 is Rep. Pan Godchaux, R-Birmingham.

- Allow courts to order vehicle forfeiture for drivers convicted a second time of any alcohol-related traffic offense. Sponsor of HB 4969 is Rep. Frank Fitzgerald, R-Grand Ledge.

- Allow the secretary of state to suspend licenses of repeat offenders and make reinstatement of driving privileges tougher. Four bills are in this package, sponsored in part by Fitzgerald and Rep. Bob Brown, D-Dearborn Heights.

- Allow felony charges to be brought against any third drunken driving charge, whether for "impaired" (0.08 percent blood alcohol count) or drunk (0.1 percent). Sponsor of HB 4956 is Rep. Rose Bogardus, D-Davison.

- Close a loophole under which a repeat offender can be charged as a first-offender in drunk driving. HB 4951 is sponsored by Rep. George Mans, D-Trediton.

The package heads to the Senate in the session starting Sept. 12.

Red light trap

Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, has a bill to catch drivers who run red lights at southeast Michigan's most dangerous intersections.

His SB 1257 calls for a two-year test at five of the worst intersections, especially Southfield Road and I-996, which has averaged 82 crashes a year since 1993.

Tellis Traffic Inc., an Arizona firm, would install equipment to take electronic photos of a vehicle's license plate when its driver ignores a red light. State Police would issue a ticket to the vehicle's owner that would carry a fine but not penalty points.

The bill will go into the hopper when the Senate reconvenes Sept. 12.

New laws

Gov. John Engler has signed into law:

- A bill to allow deer hunters to buy one license for both the firearm and archery seasons. It allows taking two deer per year. It takes immediate effect. Prices: \$26 for residents, \$240 for non-residents, \$13 for youths aged 12-16 and \$10.40 for seniors. Hunters still could buy separate licenses. Sponsor is Rep. Chuck Ferricone, R-Kalamazoo.

- Bills to exempt tangible personal property from the sales and use taxes when they are purchased for construction of

church sanctuaries. Previously only materials purchased by the church itself were exempt. Now, contractors working on churches get the exemption. Sponsors are Reps. Kirk Profit, D-Ypsilanti, and Jessie Dalman, R-Holland.

- Increased funding to inspect nursing homes and child day-care facilities. "We will now be able to hire 15 additional staff" for child care facilities, said Kathy Wilbur, director of the Department of Consumer and Industry Services. The budget bill has \$426,500 in new money for child day-care licensing and \$610,400 for eight new nursing home inspectors.

Appointments

Gov. Engler has appointed:

- Larry Nobis, partner in a St. Johns dairy farm, to the Michi-

gan Corn Marketing Committee for a term expiring March 5, 2001. The body seeks to expand the corn market through promotion and research to stimulate demand.

- Larry Patton of Troy to the Michigan Rehabilitation Advisory Council. He is CEO of L. Patton and Associates and represents business and labor. The group helps individuals with disabilities to gain employment, self-sufficiency and independence.

- Edward McRee of Eaton Rapids to the State Hospital Finance Authority. McRee is the retired president and CEO of Ingham Medical Center in Lansing. The body helps hospitals to expand, enlarge and establish health care facilities.

County moving closer to mental-health care changes

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County is a major step closer to restructuring the delivery of mental health services — a \$150 million budget item.

Beginning this week, committees of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners will begin informational meetings on a plan to establish an authority to replace the existing Community Mental Health Board.

The change won't make much difference in terms of personnel, money or services to 12,000 people with developmental disabilities or mental illness who depend on the county for mental health services.

But it will limit the county's financial obligation, according to health officials and county commissioners who have been working on the change for more than a year.

With an authority adminis-

tering mental health services, the county would not be obligated to raise taxes or tap other sources in the event the state reduces the amount of money it gives to counties. The state currently pays 80 percent of the mental health budget which is \$150 million this year.

There are no announced plans for the state to cut back on its portion. But county officials are concerned that cuts are inevitable — particularly when managed care is implemented. An authority would have financial and administrative oversight responsibilities for the delivery of mental health services.

In a related development Thursday, the CMH board of directors extended the contract for director Sandra Lindsey.

An ad hoc negotiating committee was to begin meeting Saturday to draft a new contract for the director who currently makes \$96,857 annually.

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