

Sentencing bills pass Senate despite howls

A pair of sentencing guideline bills sailed through the Michigan Senate over vocal protests from a minority.

But Sen. Patrick McCollough, D-Dearborn, was elated that one of the bills contained his amendment to impose mandatory prison sentences on persons who commit crimes against the elderly or handicapped.

"Senior citizens are victimized twice as often as the rest of the general population," said McCollough, "and nearly 20 percent of the crimes committed are against seniors."

"THE PHYSICAL injury that may be just a minor ache or pain to a younger person can be incapacitating to an older person."

His amendment would subject a convicted person to an additional 2-5 years (for crimes against the elderly or handicapped) over and above the normal sentence.

But Sen. Basil Brown, D-Highland Park, an attorney, denounced both bills as "a useless, futile and nonsensical gesture."

In objections printed in the Senate Journal, Brown said the guidelines can be ignored easily by the Court of Appeals.

"God alone only knows what those (guideline) words mean because the same judges who made them up and presented them to you on a silver platter now have the absolute final authority in the little smoke-filled chambers they occupy to decide the fate of your Criminal Code, without any public scrutiny and without any legislative involvement," the Senate's senior member said.

McCOLLOUGH's amendment was attached to Senate Bill 169, part of the penal code.

It passed the Senate on a 39-6 roll call vote. All Observer & Eccentric area senators supported it — McCollough, whose district includes Garden City; Doug Cruce, R-Troy; William Faust, R-Westland; Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills; Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield; Robert Geake, R-Northville; and Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

The companion measure (SB 168), setting up a Sentencing Guidelines Commission, passed 32-3, with support from all area senators.

The bills now go the House of Representatives.

THE GUIDELINES bill defines an elderly person as one 60 years of age or older, McCollough said.

A handicapped person is defined as someone who has a physical characteristic or condition which substantially impairs or hinders the individual, including blindness, confinement to a wheelchair, or the use of leg braces or crutches.

A lawyer himself, McCollough originally had introduced it as a separate bill, but decided that adding it as an amendment to another bill would be "the quickest way of getting it through the Senate."

In his protest, Brown said the Legislature was surrendering its policy-making authority to judges by passing "guidelines" bills.

Brown cited the case of a man convicted and sentenced by the trial judge to 15-20 years because "he deserved it." But under new Supreme Court guidelines, the Court of Appeals cut the sentence to eight years.

"Now are we getting tough with felons or are we cutting their time in half?" Brown asked.

Teacher pacts settled early

Nearly three out of four Michigan school districts have contracts with their teachers for the 1985-86 school year, the State Board of Education reported last week.

The State Board's first survey of the status of teacher-school board contract negotiations for the 1985-86 school year shows that 82 or 83 percent of Michigan's 526 K-12 school districts have ratified contracts or tentative agreements with their teachers for next year.

Rochester and Troy are among the seven largest school districts still negotiating with their teachers. Others are Detroit, Flint, Kalamazoo, Lapeer and Pontiac.

PHILLIP E. Runkel, state superintendent of public instruction, said the trend toward earlier settlements in the state's 35 largest school districts is continuing this year.

"Based on the number of districts that already have contracts for next year, it would appear that we will have fewer teacher strikes than at any time in nearly 20 years," Runkel said.

Only seven of the 35 largest districts are without teacher contracts for the next year, compared to 10 at this time last year, and 13 and 18, respectively, in the two years before that.

Runkel said this represents an all-time high in the number of contract settlements that have been reached for the coming school year for this time of the year.

Three years ago at this time, Runkel said, 45 percent of the school districts said they had contracts for the coming school year. Two years ago 52 percent reported they had contracts with their teachers. Last year, 61 percent had ratified contracts or tentative agreements by June 1.

THE STATE board report shows that 15 school districts will complete the current school year without reaching a contract agreement with their teachers — the lowest number in many years.

In 1982-83, the school year ended without contracts being reached in a record 55 school districts, and last year, 20 districts

were without contracts when the school year ended.

The state superintendent said he hopes that most of the 144 districts that are still negotiating for contracts for the 1985-86 school year will reach a settlement by the end of summer, and that those that are unable to do so will continue negotiating after school opens.

The first teacher strikes in Michigan occurred during the 1968-69 school year when there were four strikes. Only twice since then have there been fewer than 10 strikes during a school year — nine in 1971-72 and six in 1976-77.

The highest number of strikes occurred in 1979-80, when there were 70. There have been 13 teacher strikes during the 1984-85 school year.

M-59 is now a boulevard

M-59 has been upgraded to a four-lane boulevard along a 16-mile stretch in Oakland and Livingston counties, the Michigan Department of Transportation announced.

The east-west road now is multi-laned from US-23 in Livingston County to Utica in Macomb County, said MDOT Director James P. Pitz.

"It's a fine stretch of highway — well able to serve the area for the foreseeable future," he added. Traffic volumes range up to 17,000 vehicles a day and are projected to increase 40 percent by the end of the century.

Pitz said recent completion of the last leg — from US-23 to Williams Lake Road — capped a seven-year program that started in 1977. Cost of the four-lane widening projects totaled \$20.4 million.

OU enrollment dates set

Two deadlines for Oakland University enrollment are approaching.

Registration for summer semester graduate students closes June 24.

Deadline for receiving undergraduate applications for the fall semester is Aug. 1.

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