

Petition

Right to Life officials gather signatures

By Joanne Mallazewski
staff writer

Right to Life of Michigan says signatures came in at the rate of 2,700 a day during the first month of its anti-abortion petition drive.

But a pro-choice spokeswoman doubts that's true.

"Everyone lies when they release

the figures," state Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, said recently. "I've done it. I've never heard anyone tell the truth. Generally, you inflate (the number of signatures acquired) early and deflate late" to spur backers' efforts.

Right to Life of Michigan President Barbara Listing said the numbers she released were accurate:

81,197 petition signatures gathered from Feb. 8 through March 8. That doesn't include signatures Right to Life staffers have crossed off petitions because they appeared invalid. "We're pleased with it," Listing said.

The state's largest anti-abortion organization is trying to end state-paid abortions for poor women.

In February, the organization opened a battle station in Farmington Hills at 27380 Orchard Lake. Volunteers in the new office are charged with spearheading the petition drive in southeastern Michigan.

IF THE petition drive nets 191,726 valid signatures within a 180-day period, the state Legislature would be given a veto-proof way to end Medicaid abortions. The southeastern Michigan effort is expected to provide 161,000 of the total signatures needed, Listing said.

Right to Life has been advised by the Michigan Secretary of State's office that a 25 percent buffer should be considered because of inevitable invalid signatures. "Thus, our real goal must be about 255,000 petition signatures," Listing added.

The initiative drive is the newest twist in the organization's continuing struggle to halt the state spending tax dollars on poor women's abortions. In the past, anti-abortion activists have tried to ban Medicaid abortion funding from the state budget.

But each of the 16 past attempts to ban Medicaid abortion funding has been stymied by votes from Gov. James Blanchard and his predecessor, Gov. William Milliken. The votes involved Medicaid money. Tax money finances abortions through government workers' medical benefits, which the initiative

does not address.

If Right to Life gathers the required signatures, the petition effort could cut the governor out of the decision-making process because initiatives automatically become law with a simple majority vote of the Legislature. If lawmakers fail to approve the initiative within 40 days, it would go on the November 1988 ballot.

SO FAR, about \$70,000 has been spent on the petition effort. The drive is expected to cost another \$30,000, Listing said.

Pro-choice forces have been working on a counter strategy but remain tight-lipped about their plans, saying only that it will involve the efforts of a wide coalition of organizations.

Berman said pro-choice activists expect the anti-abortion camp to succeed in its petition-gathering mission.

She also agreed with Listing that a significant portion of the petition signatures may come from people who don't share Right to Life's philosophy but would like a chance to settle the issue in the voting booth.

Associated Press contributed to this report.



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Citizen-assist calls rise in Farmington

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"The department saw an increase in child sexual abuse cases reported over what had been experienced in recent years," the report said.

INCREASES WERE also reflected in aggravated assault statistics, which showed an increase from eight reports in 1985 to 14 reports in 1986. In 12 cases, some type of weapon was used.

Mayor William Hartsock appeared disheartened with the increased assault incidents in the city, as the city council reviewed the report at a recent meeting. "It's certainly discouraging to see any type of criminal increase," he said.

Citizen involvement and awareness, including Neighborhood Watch programs, aided in lowering burglary incidents 5 percent for residential and 2 percent for commercial.

There was a 5 percent decrease in value of property stolen in the city, although the average loss increased from \$1,139 to \$1,289, according to the report. "Jewelry and precious metals continued to be a popular target," the report said.

AUTO ACCESSORIES and parts stolen increased 58 percent in 1986, from 41 to 64 incidents, while other

larcenies, including shopliftings, reportedly declined. Of property stolen in 1986, the public safety department reported that 72 percent, or \$526,873, was recovered.

A total of 1,148 lesser offenses, including vandalism, threats, public nuisances and drug violations, were reported in Farmington in 1986. Increases were reported in all of these areas and the report said it is "the highest number of such offenses reported/detected annually at any point during the last 10-year period."

Most of the calls handled by the department involved non-criminal matters. A total of 6,671 requests for assistance were answered during 1986, compared with 6,487 such calls the previous year.

Calls to assist the public have risen 27 percent during the past 10 years, according to the report. In 1977, the city reported 4,559 such calls.

Overall, the number of public safety responses, both criminal and non-criminal, rose from 6,016 in 1977 to 8,354 today.

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