Support is scarce for anti-dropout bills

By Tim Richard,
staff writer

Its three sponsors are adamant, but bills to suspend the driver's license of high school dropouts and truants are in trouble in a state legislative committee.

"If the sponsors don't have 10 votes, we won't waste the committee's time next week," said House Education Committee chairman William Keith, D-Garden City. The 19-member panel meets at 10:30 Tuesday mornings.

Members from Livonia, Detroit, the Flint area and the Upper Peninsula spoke against the bill, as did a lobbyist for 10 western Wayne County school districts.

House Bills 4234, 4183 and 4184 would require a public school superintendent to report dropouts' and truants' names to the Secretary of State for license suspension, and require license issuance to be dependent on school attendance.

Sponsors are Republican Reps. Philip Hoffman of Horton, Michael Nye of Litchfield and Gerald Law of Plymouth, respectively. Chief supporting group is the Secondary School Principals Association.

JERRY DUNN, lobbyist for the western Wayne school districts, said the superintendents consider the plan a state-mandated service for which they wouldn't be paid, although state reimbursement is required by the constitution.

"There's no provision for an option. The bill says 'A superintendent shall . . .' It's one more thing you expect superintendents to do for nothing," said Dunn, a former state senator whose clients include South Redford, Livonia and Plymouth-Canton.

"It's a noble idea, but it's the wrong way to attack the problem," said Dunn.

"My superintendent said this was a toothless tiger," added Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, a member of the Education Committee. "In my school district, the dropout rate is 5 percent and usually less than 3 percent. In others, it's 60 percent."

Another member, Rep. Claude Trim, R-Waterford, favored the bill, telling Dunn: "The original bill made it mandated policy. This (version) is permissive."

"WE SOMETIMES have to have a hammer," said sponsor Nye. "It (suspending a dropout's license) grabs their attention real quick."

Asked Rep. Nate Jonker, D-Clio: "I can't think of any research that supports the hammer — just the opposite. Do you have any data?" asked Jonker, a former teacher who called the license bills "negative." Jonker favors mento and alternative education programs to lower dropout rates.

Firm gathers food, funds

By Noreen Flack
special writer

Crusaders from A.L. Williams were out to "make a difference" last week, organizing a food drive among its 21 Oakland County offices and setting a trend for private firms to aid the needy.

The marketing firm donated 2,200 canned goods and $2,000 to the Oakland County Food Bank Saturday during its regional group meeting at the Mercy Center in Farmington Hills.

DOUGLAS E. SUSALLA

Rhonda Byer (left) of A.L. Williams and Jim Macy of the Oakland County Food Bank look over donated goods Saturday at Mercy Center.

A.L. Williams officials say the group is working in conjunction with President Bush's request for the private sector to join together, independent of government, and offer aid to the poor.

"This represents the future for benefiting the unfortunate," Farmington Hills Mayor Terry Sever said. "In my politics, more of the message is that there is a major concern, but there is no money. The only way is for corporations like this to reach out and make it happen."

A.L. Williams is a national marketing corporation that "sells dreams" dealing with financial products, such as life insurance and training business people. The largest of its 60 Michigan offices is in Southfield.

THE OAKLAND County Food Bank receives, stores and distributes donated food throughout 60 shelters, soup kitchens and pantries in Oakland County.

"When things get tough, the only thing that keeps you going is what is deepest inside you, the human spirit," Food Bank director Jim Macy said. "The only way to awaken the human spirit and release its power in your life is by giving."

A.L. Williams plans on doing more food drives in the future, national sales director Jerry Byer said.

"If you study our company, you will see that we are a real people-helping-people organization," Byer said.

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• GRAND RAPIDS—Eastbrook Shopping Ctr., 28th & E. Beltline
• PONTIAC—Oakland Pointe, 2901 Telegraph Rd
• CLARKSTON—Clarkston Shopping Center
• BEDFORD—Bedford Plaza, 9370 Telegraph Rd
• ROCHESTER HILLS—Avon at Crooks, 375 S. Livernois
• CANTON—Waterford Commons, 4535 Joy Rd
• NOVI—West Oaks II
• FARMINGTON—33625 Grand River
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• LIVONIA PLAZA—30900 Five Mile Road

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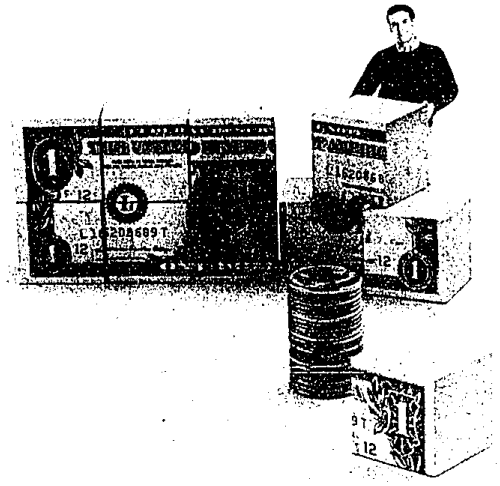

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