

Child sex assault unit clears county hearings

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

County officials have reached a tentative agreement that will provide personnel for the Child Sex Assault Unit requested by Prosecutor Richard Thompson.

Under an agreement outlined at budget hearings Monday, commissioners will provide the prosecutor with four additional assistants to work exclusively on sex cases involving youngsters.

The prosecutor also will get two additional social workers. But they will be temporarily assigned — most likely from probate court — rather than becoming a permanent part of Thompson's 78-member staff.

The agreement has yet to be voted upon by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. But it has been reviewed and tentatively approved at budget hearings by both the personnel and finance committees.

"No one disagrees with the basic concept of the unit," said commissioner John G. Pappageorge, R-Troy. "It's always been a matter of organization and finance."

ASSIGNING SOCIAL workers to the child sex unit would resolve a number of problems while providing the prosecutor with personnel needed to do the job, said Pappageorge.

By having them temporarily assigned from another unit, social workers could be rotated periodically for promotion, he said.

Commissioner James D. Ferrens, D-Pontiac, said rotating the assignment would be advisable because of stress and other pressures related to



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continually working with sex crimes involving children.

"I've worked on a number of such cases," said Ferrens, a Pontiac police officer for 20 years. "They're depressing. Retaining the assignment would help avoid burnout."

Either way, those assigned to the child sex assault unit would need psychological screening prior to being assigned and periodically once on the job, Ferrens said.

As outlined by Thompson, the child sex assault unit would include four assistant prosecutors with a reduced workload — a maximum of 50 cases per year compared with more than 500 for other assistants — and specialized training.

The assistant prosecutors and social workers would take more time with each of the victimized youngsters.

BESIDES EASING trauma, specialized attention would help young victims become more reliable and credible witnesses to enhance the chances of convicting their assailants, Thompson said.

In a related development, an open house was scheduled for 4:30 p.m. today to commemorate the official opening of CARE (Child Abuse Resource Effort) House in Pontiac.

CARE House, at 536 W. Huron, is a facility to receive sexually abused children where they will be interviewed in a friendly atmosphere.

Among the officials scheduled to be at the press conference are Thompson, Meg Mittel, executive director of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council; Booker Dennis, director of the Oakland County Department of Social Services and Dennis McGeer of the Oakland County Police Chiefs' Association.

TIA eyes federal grant

The Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County has applied for federal funds to get local officials and corporate leaders together to study, then set priorities for a countywide master plan to manage traffic congestion.

The move was announced last week by James L. Tolley, TIA Board Chairman and CEO, at the TIA's 22nd Annual Luncheon Meeting at Roma Hall in Bloomfield Township.

Oakland County's traffic problem can't be solved, but it can be better managed, keynote speaker C. Kenneth Orski told the group. Orski is president of the Urban Mobility Corp., a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm specializing in transportation issues.

Orski's frank appraisal of the country's probable success in meet-

ing its problem of congestion was presented to 200 members attending the luncheon.

"WE PREFER to live and work at different locations, and we develop our suburbs at densities that are, at once, too high for the free flow of traffic on highways and too low to support an efficient mass transit system," Orski said.

"Thus, there may be no way to solve the traffic congestion problem. However, there are ways of effectively managing it."

He cited three strategies for managing traffic congestion:

- Incrementally expanding road capacity
- Programs to better manage traffic demand
- Monitoring the intensity and

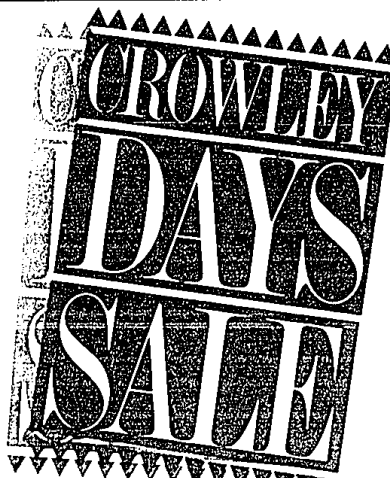
pace of development. Orski emphasized that no public works issues are more important than improving the highway system.

He stressed the fact that traffic congestion is an extra-ordinarily complex problem that defies quick fixes.

"In the final analysis, traffic congestion is not a technical problem nor a problem of inadequate facilities, but a consequence of the manner in which we choose to live."

TIA'S ROLE as a non-profit, public support agency will be primarily directed to helping manage traffic demand, the second of Orski's suggested strategies. Approaches recommended include ride sharing, alternative work hours, parking management, growth management and others.

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