

DSS head favors restoring welfare benefits

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Gerald Miller, Gov. John Engler's director of social services, said he wants to restore family welfare benefits to the federal floor of \$456 a month next year.

But Miller wants to cut other welfare programs, and last week the administration took a lot of heat from contractors who provide the services.

"This contract has been a bargain to Michigan taxpayers," said Amanda Good, who gets \$78,000 a year to run an outreach program for street girls in southwest Detroit.

GOOD TOLD A Senate appropriations panel headed by R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, that DSS isn't renewing her contract.

Besides a shelter and residential drug treatment, Good said her staff of 15 plus volunteers scout the Michigan-Wyoming avenues area approaching "girls who have been beaten up by pimps and boyfriends, with high risk of AIDS and herpes. We give them condoms, food and clothes."

She told Vanessa, a prostitute who just turned 18 whom she had ap-

proached four times before making contact.
"She left home at 12 after three years of sex abuse by two brothers who gave her marijuana and alcohol to make her compliant. She has herpes in remission," Good said.

SWAN ATTY, coordinator of teenage pregnancy programs for an Arab social program based in Dearborn, said her clients have language barriers and can't be served by any other agency.

Her organization is called AC-CESS — Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. "This is the only bilingual and culturally sensitive program for Arab Americans," Atty said.

"Many girls are encouraged to drop out of school at 15 or 16. Their husbands have no jobs, little education. There is no family planning. There are few unmarried teens," Atty said.

She told of a 15-year-old, married a year earlier in Syria, whose heroin-addicted husband has been threatening her. "We were able to help her," Atty said.

Nancy Adadow Gray, head of AC-CESS, said it serves 21,000, up 70 percent in two or three years.

"There are no alternatives," she said.

The program is due for cutting and would be transferred from DSS to the Public Health Department under Engler's budget for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

Funding of a program to aid Arab Americans, concentrated in Dearborn and the Farmington Hills-Southfield area, was begun by Gov. James Blanchard.

LANDLORD Elaine Arnold of Hazel Park asked that those who rent to social services recipients get "vendor" checks directly from DSS because people on welfare often don't pay their rents.

"A renter can accept a shelter grant (from DSS) and go behind (in rent). It's unfair. It's a waste of tax dollars."

"We are the only business denied payment for the product. The gas and light companies receive arrearages. Is it because we (landlords)

don't have a big lobby?"
Arnold held up a handful of food stamps which she said were purchased on the black market for 30 cents per \$1 of stamp. "So I'm not buying that kids are going hungry," she told Geake's panel.

She gave her formula for "how to encourage a kid to quit school. Give him a general assistance (GA) grant for a party pad."

MILLER, HEAD of the state's largest department, said DSS is doing a better job estimating the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) caseload than was done by the Blanchard administration.

"Whatever the policy decisions, we ought to adequately fund them and not underestimate the caseload so that we don't need supplemental appropriations," he said. Miller referred to Blanchard's late 1990 request for nearly \$500 million to supplement the adopted \$2 billion wel-

fare budget. Current AFDC caseload is 240,000.

Miller said the Engler administration is recommending these changes:

- Placing the 1992 AFDC grant at \$436 a month, the same as the federal floor. Blanchard's 1991 budget set the base at \$451, or \$15 higher than the floor. When the budget had to be cut in mid-year, the current level was set at \$374.

- Eliminating the general assistance (98,000 adults) and Job Start (11,000 youngsters) programs. In their place would be a program for

9,700 disabled people. "Single adults need to be ranked below families and other priorities of government," Miller said.

IN PREPARED remarks, Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. spokesman Patrick J. Murray criticized the Engler proposal to cut funding for energy assistance programs.

Murray said the proposed cuts "will leave all but a small percentage of the current population without any reasonable assurance of energy service."

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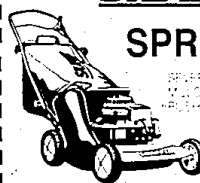
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