

Senate panel studying Oakland DSS child abuse case

AP — State child protection workers aren't to blame for the rape and slaying of a 5-year-old girl whose caseworker was suspended, officials said Thursday.

The state Department of Social Services said a complaint about abuse of Cassandra Ann Kelly wasn't ignored just because the Oakland County DSS worker assigned to her case was disciplined.

Sen. Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, is investigating allegations that the complaint sat unhandled in the

employee's file. DSS spokeswoman Karen Smith said the agency would never do that.

"You cannot do that, especially in an area such as protective services," Smith said. "That is just not the kind of work that can just sit. It is just so critical."

Welborn chairs the Senate Family Law, Criminal Law, and Corrections Committee. He is questioning the way the DSS Oakland County officials handled the case. But he said he's been stonewalled by confi-

dentiality laws.

"My concern is that because of problems other children could be at risk," the senator said.

Booker Dennis, director of the Oakland County division of the Department of Social Services, called the allegations "totally preposterous."

Dennis, who oversees managers of the county's four child protective services offices, declined further comment. He cited confidentiality laws, which also protect files on

Cassandra's case.

Welborn is working in his committee to allow records to be open in certain situations.

Cassandra, of Waterford Township, died after Eric Francis Welch knocked her out by holding a cloth soaked with commercial cleaning solvent over her face. He then raped her at least twice, investigators said.

Welch was convicted of first-degree murder and first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He was sen-

tenced to three life terms.

Testimony in Welch's trial revealed the girl had been abused before.

Employees in the Pontiac office of the county's child protective services made the allegations on the stagnant files to Welborn and Dennis.

Employees at the office that received complaints of Cassandra's abuse appealed Tuesday to the DSS to ease stressful conditions at the office, where they said two em-

ployees have been fired and three suspended in a two-year period.

Last spring, a sign was posted at the office that read, "This is the Royal Oak post office."

That referred to last fall's shooting rampage by a disgruntled former postal worker that left five people dead at the post office. Investigators said stress between employees and management led to the shootings.

Unemployment at 9.4 percent

Young people entering the state's job market in search of summer employment helped raise Michigan's July unemployment rate to a seasonally adjusted 9.4 percent.

F. Robert Edwards, director of the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC), reported the number of jobless workers climbed by 33,000 to 437,000 in July. June's jobless total was 404,000, with an unemployment rate of 8.8 percent.

"There were some job increases in the retail sector and in local government because of summer jobs programs," Edwards said, "but most industries in the state reported little new hiring activity last month."

In addition, there were scattered model changeover layoffs in the auto industry.

Edwards said July estimates are based on a mid-month household survey and, consequently, fail to reflect the two-week statewide shutdown of General Motors facilities that occurred at the end of the month.

The combination of a large labor force gain and moderate employment growth caused higher unemployment in July.

Michigan's labor force climbed by 52,000, rising to 4.6 million. Employment rose by 19,000 to 4.2 million.

The state's jobless rate is at its highest July level since 10.6 percent in 1985.

Sports events out for blood

The Southeastern Michigan Blood Services Region of the American Red Cross will celebrate blood and sports with two events scheduled to prevent a Labor Day blood shortage.

Beginning Aug. 24, 10 local blood donor centers will conduct daily drawings for tickets to the Tigers-Sept. 21 game against the Boston Red Sox. The finale of the promotion will be a special drive at the Dearborn Ritz-Carlton on Sept. 5, where 500 pairs of tickets will be given away.

For those who prefer putters to sluggers, the Red Cross is also offering a "Putt a Pint" Golf Tournament Sept. 12 at Detroit's Palmer Park Golf Course. To enter the tournament, golfers are required to donate blood or have someone else donate blood for them. Further donations will take strokes off the entrant's game.

For further information on either event, contact Helinda Pickle at 494-2745.

Agencies fight drug abuse

Oakland Family Services and HAVEN, an area shelter for battered and abused women and their children, have joined together to provide substance abuse education to HAVEN residents.

The program is directed by a team of OPS therapists. Four sessions are held every two weeks. Attendance is mandatory.

Topics include addiction, family dynamics and recovery. The program is financed by the Center for Substance Abuse Services.

Flea market celebrates

On Aug. 30, the Royal Oak Flea Market will become something of an antique when it celebrates its 20th birthday.

The market, a haven for those seeking odds and ends, was started by market master Steve Sendek.

It is now home to 85 dealers. The market is open Sundays, 9-4 in summer, 9-5 in fall at 316 E. 11 Mile.

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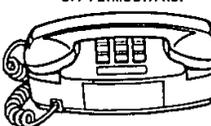
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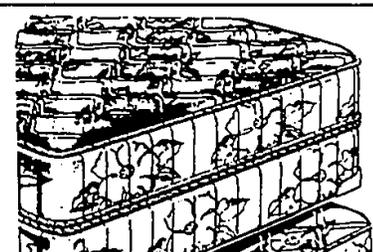
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