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which the children were allegedly left at home for hours and could have been victims of a fire or other catastrophes, is one where it is not difficult for the county's DCS to determine whether to charge the parent. In many cases, it's a matter of judgment by the department.

"You have to look at the ages of the children, how long the child was left alone, what time of day or night, those factors," Mussen said.

Under Michigan's Child Protection Law, protective services must notify police in cases of injury from suspected abuse or neglect. And police have the power, as they have done in the Hanna case, to remove the children from the home immediately. The Hanna children are in the care of an aunt.

Mussen said many "latchkey" children are home alone after school but before parents return from work. Whether they have a support system, a way to get in contact with their parents or other adults, has a lot to do with whether they are considered neglected, he said.

"You have to look at the ages and circumstances," Mussen said. "The law doesn't specify any age. So it's mainly a matter of judgment."

Mussen said his department considers preschoolers as being incapable of taking care of themselves. He also said a majority of neglect cases involve a single parent.

Hanna, who is a single parent, admitted wrongdoing at a hearing to determine custody Saturday at Children's Village.

"What I did was wrong," she said. "I made a bad mistake. My children are the most important people — in the world to me."

Hanna, a former police officer in Detroit for 14 years, is contesting custody with her former husband Wissan Hanna. She told police that she locked them in her house because she feared that her husband would take the children back to his native Lebanon.

Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said Hanna had won a lawsuit against the Detroit Police for sexual harassment.



ART EMANUELE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Leaving home: Gloria Hanna leaves her Farmington Hills home Feb. 5 for a trip to the police station and questions about leaving her 5-year-old twins home alone.

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way to convince state government cutting school revenues by 20 percent would be devastating unless they are reimbursed in a manner that is equitable and well researched," he said.

The worst case scenario is simple. Schools affected would be left with two choices: Ask the voters for more money or endure the cuts.

For Farmington Public Schools, a 20-percent cut would mean a loss of \$16 million.

"We wouldn't be able to carry on the programs we have right now," Barrett said, addressing the latter.

Another millage proposal? Superintendent Michael Flanagan said he couldn't recommend one.

Said Flanagan: "That's the only way you're going to put the pressure on the legislature. Otherwise, that becomes our pressure." But he added: "To be honest, that's a recommendation. How long can you live with that? Can you absolutely watch a system get destroyed? I don't know."

School officials felt the tremors coming out of Lansing prior to Engler's proposal.

After all, the "Cut and Cap" proposal was voted down in November. Engler would be steadfast in providing some type of property tax reform.

With that in mind, school officials went to the voters with a tax renewal. They didn't go for the full levy of 14 mills over three years. The 12.0834 mills asked to be renewed reflected Headlee Amendment rollbacks.

In other words, schools officials say they did the "responsible" thing. Not surprisingly, that same term is bandied about on Engler's plan.

"You can't cut 20 percent and walk away," Barrett said. "It's not the responsible thing to do."

The question is, will Engler's plan pass? One official pointed out, except for the Headlee Amendment in 1978, several reform proposals have failed.

This one has momentum, though. Statewide, homeowners face an average assessment increase of 11 percent after last year's freeze. The average increase is nine percent in Farmington, five percent in Farmington Hills.

Other proposals are under consideration.

One bipartisan plan was introduced in the state House. Part of the proposal includes raising the state income tax from four to six percent while rolling back school taxes on homes to 16 mills. Each district would be guaranteed at least \$4,840 a student.

Engler's plan looks like the front-runner, though.

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