

Corrections costs

Kaza in minority in no vote on prison budget

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Hold down soaring prison costs, the state House of Representatives warned Gov. John Engler recently as it passed a record corrections department budget.

The vote was 78 to 18. Conservatives tried many amendments and succeeded on two.

"The fastest-growing category of state government in the last decade was corrections," said freshman Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, a "no" vote.

"Corrections spending increased from about \$200 million in the early 1980s to \$1.15 billion in this appropriation. This trend is expected to continue through the 1990s."

"So why is Lansing spending \$1.2 million on free college education for maximum security prisoners when so many law-abiding families need tax relief to pay for their own offspring's education? Why are we debating today how to make it easier for prisoners to receive welfare upon their release, when so many working men and women need tax relief to feed their families?" said Kaza.

Rep. Kirk Profit, D-Ypsilanti, voted no for different reasons. "I do not support using 37.1 percent of all new revenues for (fiscal) 1994 for the department of corrections," said Profit, one of the inner circle of Democratic leaders.

Profit said the new money should go for "job creation efforts, environmental protection, educational opportunity, mental health

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and other, more positive, investment-oriented state efforts."

Engler warned

On final passage, all area lawmakers but Kaza voted yes and sent the bill to the Senate.

The real battle was over amendments.

Profit and Republican Bill Martin of Battle Creek won voice approval of an amendment to restrict prisoner workers: "The department shall not allow prisoners to perform any work that would require a license if performed by anyone other than a prisoner."

A second Martin and Profit amendment warned Gov. John Engler and Attorney General Frank Kelley "not (to) enter into a consent decree or judgment concerning the operation of a correctional facility without prior approval" of legislators. It passed by a voice vote.

It was the lawmakers' way of saying they were angry that \$84 million in new spending was imposed by federal courts.

Vorva, Jamian lose

Freshman Rep. Jerry Vorva, R-Plymouth, and Rep. John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Township, lost their efforts to amend the bill.

The House rejected Vorva's amendment to require the corrections department to "implement programs to recover the cost of

imprisonment and education" by "recovery of costs from tax refunds, wages, judgments" and other payments.

The vote was 44 to 50.

Yes votes were cast by Republicans Penny Crissman of Rochester, Jamian, Kaza, Vorva and Deborah Whyman of Canton.

No votes were cast by Republicans Lyn Bankes of Livonia, Barbara Dobb of Union Lake, Jan Dolan of Farmington, and Shirley Johnson of Royal Oak; and Democrats Maxine Berman of Southfield and Richard Young of Dearborn Heights.

Missing the vote were Democrats Justine Barns of Westland and William Keith of Garden City.

Jamian, a second-term member, teamed with David Jaye, R-Utica, in a losing effort to add: "If a prisoner performs tutorial services for another prisoner, half of the funds appropriated . . . shall first be used to pay any amount of restitution owed by the prisoner or used to reimburse the cost of the prisoner's incarceration."

Jamian's amendment failed, 52 to 48, with 55 needed for passage.

Yes — Republicans Bankes, Crissman, Jamian, Kaza, Vorva and Whyman.

No — Republicans Dobb, Dolan and Johnson; Democrats Berman, Keith and Young.

Democrat Barns missed the vote.

3 new prisons

The budget measure funds the

opening of three new prisons that had been built but mothballed for lack of operating revenues.

It also was a one-year appropriation, though Gov. Engler had proposed a two-year budget.

Jaye, the Utica conservative known for his desire to upset the Lansing appointee, cited a long list of objections to line items in the bill.

"The budget gives Michigan prisoners free college education with no repayment requirements, provides a \$500,000 indoor exercise facility at each prison, provides for \$200,000 annually for each prison to operate an electronic law library, free health care, free room and board, free laundry services and free entertainment."

"Civilian food testers ensure that mashed potatoes are served hot and Jell-O is served chilled."

"Michigan convicts are overloading court dockets and squandering \$5 million annually with hundreds of frivolous lawsuits against the state. A repeat actually claimed he lost a clearinghouse sweepstakes because the state mailed his entry form too late . . . Over 34 state-paid attorneys handle 4,008 inmate lawsuits now pending."

Meanwhile, lawmakers are moving to curb court appeals by inmates. The senate has approved a constitutional amendment lifting the automatic right to appeal of convicts who have pleaded guilty.

The House has yet to act.

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