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Legal Services Gets Funding Boost

The Executive Budget recommendation for the Judiciary Budget recommended an **increase of \$600,000** in indigent civil legal assistance funding to a total of \$7,937,000, due to additional state restricted funds available from the 2003 judicial fee increases and from better collections.



The Senate Appropriations Judiciary Subcommittee chaired by Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) has reported the budget bill out to the full Appropriations Committee and retained the funding increase recommended by the Governor.

Mike Chielens, President of the Legal Services Association of Michigan, provided testimony before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee. Mr. Chielens explained to committee members the structure and type of work that legal services provides throughout the state and highlighted how effective and efficient legal services offices are in serving the needs of their clients. He also met with the chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee, Rep. Glenn Steil Jr. (R-Cascade Twp.) to provide similar background. At this time, the House Judiciary Appropriations Subcommittee has

not reported out the Judiciary budget due to a new budgeting for outcomes process that the House has initiated which has slowed the traditional appropriations process.

Recommendations Announced, Legislation Expected

The Long-Term Care Task Force released its recommendations last week, most notably including the “single point of entry” system for consumers to learn about their options regarding long-term care. The Chairwoman of the Task Force, RoAnne Cheney, believes that the “single point of entry” will provide sources of information and assistance.

The purpose behind the long-term care (LTC) task force is the growing number of older and elderly persons who will need these services in the coming years. Legislators such as Matt Gillard (D-Alpena) will be introducing legislation soon based on the recommendations of the LTC task force. Rep. Andy Dillon (D-Redford) had this to say about the problem of long-term care:

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Phone: 517-372-0860 Fax: 517-372-0723

email: cspag@capitolservices.org

Legal Services Association of Michigan

Chairperson: Michael Chielens

Vice Chairperson: Mary Ellen Drolet

Secretary-Treasurer: Ken Penokie

“Nationwide, we’re realizing the baby boomer generation is reaching the point in their lives where long-term care is becoming more of a reality. It’s debatable if we are in a crisis right now, but if we don’t reform our system, we will be.”

Elder Abuse Week Kicks off May 16th

The importance of knowledge in regard to elder abuse (harm, or threatened harm to an adult’s health or welfare) is due to the reality of 2 out of 3 seniors being at-risk for scams according to Gene Mellon, of



the adult protective services division of the Ingham County Department of Human Services.

Scams seniors fall prey to include duplicate medical insurance offers, investment opportunities where the money is untouchable, fraudulent insurance offers, “free lunch” investment seminars, false government-approved programs and e-mails or websites that appeal to religious or cultural affiliations.

Liz Ranney, a crisis operations team leader at Gryphon Place, of Kalamazoo, says another problem is that people do not want to report other family members and often stay silent about senior abuse.

Governor Granholm’s proclamation of Elder Abuse Awareness Week happened to be the week that the Long Term Care Retirement Package, which are 17 bills aimed at more tools and accountability for caregivers were showcased.

Michigan Top of Medicaid Heap

The Department of Community Health released their findings—Michigan has the highest Medicaid combined recovery and cost avoidance, per beneficiary, of states of

similar sizes or location. They were able to recover \$832 per Medicaid beneficiary. These statistics are particularly important when considering that Medicaid covers about 1.4 million people or 14% of the state’s population and is expected to cost about \$7.5 billion, 23 percent of which comes from the general fund.

Michigan isn’t doing this alone, however. They’ve contracted with Health Management Systems, Inc., a New York City-based firm that specializes in cost avoidance and combined recovery measures. Since 1994 they have helped recover more than \$50 million for the state. For additional information about this topic, check out the May 2-8, 2005 issue of *Crain’s Detroit Business*.

Prescription Drug Pricing Website Debuts

Governor Granholm, along with Janet Olszewski, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH), announced that consumers will now have online access to state pricing information for commonly prescribed drugs. Granholm said, "This new website will provide Michigan Citizens with much-needed



information about prescription drug costs. The site, www.michigan.gov/mdch, will provide the average prices for the top 25 most commonly prescribed drugs in Michigan as reported by First Health Corporation. According to the MDCH the prices represent the costs for a one-month supply of the drugs and are comparable to what a paying customer without insurance would pay.

Janet Olszewski, MDCH director, said, "The information is presented to Michigan consumers in a very useful format, while at the same time presenting the information to consumers in a responsible-and ultimately safe-way. We want the citizens of Michigan to have access to this information so they can make informed decisions about the much-needed prescription drugs they require."

Michigan Food Assistance

According to *Economic Security*, the quarterly newsletter from the Michigan League for Human Services, during the final quarter of 2004, Michigan's Food Assistance caseload increased by 16.6 percent over the same quarter the previous year, while the Family Independence Program caseload remained, for the most part, the same. The article goes on to say that, "this is in keeping with the caseload trends of each program over the past four years, which saw Food Assistance households increase by nearly 200,000 since late 2000 while the Family Independence Program caseload remained between 70,000 and 79,000 for most of that time."

Food Scarcity, Cigarette Surplus

A food desert is a place in an urban area where there are not opportunities for healthy foods. Attributed partially to the growth of suburban superstores, these deserts impair people who are often least able to afford higher costs of local convenience store food or extra travel time to lower cost suburban food stores.

In Lansing, the Allen Neighborhood on the east side of town qualified as such in 2003. Despite the presence of a grocery store on the edge of town, physical barriers such as a

highway overpass prevent residents from accessing it. When surveyed, nearly 30% of residents stated they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat.

In Detroit, there were three low-income zip codes in the center of town that qualified in 2000. Even though less than one-fifth, (19%) of stores carried a minimal selection from which people could make healthy meals, ALL stores carried cigarettes.

The silver lining with food deserts is that they are being identified, with the hope of rectification. With this information many organizations such as non-profits, city and university collaborators are trying to alleviate the needs of residents within the food deserts.

They are encouraging major retailers to come back into the city and at the same time exploring alternative food sources like vegetable gardens, community supported agriculture and farmers markets.



For additional information, refer to *MSU's Community News & Views*, Vol. 17, No.1, Winter 2004.

Website Launched--Office of Community and Faith Based Initiatives

The Governor's Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives (OCFBI) has launched a web site for community and faith-based groups across the state. According to the OCFBI, the web site, www.michigan.gov/outreach, will provide 24-hour access to information including federal grants, state initiatives and other partnership opportunities for faith-based organizations.



Saginaw RICC Fundraiser Helps Underground Railroad

The Saginaw Remote Initial Claims Center (RICC) “SuperStars” team held a fundraiser to help the Underground Railroad, a Saginaw woman’s and family shelter. RICC collected gently worn clothing, soft toys and personal items for the shelter. They also raised \$485 for the shelter.



As SuperStars member Susan Bigras put it, “We talk to a lot of people throughout the day who are down on their luck. As a result, we get a great deal of satisfaction in doing charitable work. It’s our compassion outlet, and it’s important to each and every one of us.”

Connecticut, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Texas and Virginia.

For more information on the New Mexico program, visit <http://www.aft.org>

The Results are in: Extra Schooldays Matter

New Mexico’s Kindergarten-Plus program, designed to give at-risk students extra instructional days, is showing increased literacy skills like letter naming and word sound fluency. In addition, New Mexico evaluators found parents have been getting more involved and the students are more socially mature than their peers.



Seeing the benefits of the program first hand, Los Padillas Elementary School kindergarten teacher Miriam Martinez has this to say for the program: “Kindergarten is usually the first time [the children] meet with formal education; just in terms of socialization, those extra days are very important.” Other states may be picking up on the Kindergarten-Plus program including