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Budgets Expected to Move Before Break

The legislative spring break for the House begins the last week of March and both chambers are set to begin moving budget bills this week before the spring break begins. The Department of Human Services Budget begins in the House this year chair of the appropriations subcommittee for DHS, Rep. Dudley Spade (D-Tipton) plans to move the bill next week. Overall, the budgets have been non-controversial, a significant change from years past.

The DHS budget includes some small increases such as a 2 percent increase to the cash assistance grant, an increase in the annual children's clothing allowance to \$75, and a \$5 per month increase to the State Disability Assistance program. Funding for the Mi-Café program operated by Elder Law of Michigan was recommended to continue at the current \$70,000 amount.

The Department of Community Health budget also did not continue any substantial changes. Sen. Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw Twp.), chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for DCH is expected to move that bill this week as well.

Utility Shutoff Measure Introduced

House Democrats have announced a package of bills that would ban utilities from shutting off service to senior citizens in the winter. Two bills that have been introduced in the package thus far are HB 5593 sponsored by Rep. Richard LeBlanc (D-Westland) and HB 5325 sponsored by Rep. Bettie Cook Scott (D-Detroit).

HB 5593 would require a minimum of 15 days notice of termination of service before the specified date of shutoff. HB 5325 would amend the Public Service Commission law (MCL 460.9d) to allow a gas or electric service customer with a documented "serious medical condition" requiring gas or electric service (or whose household includes a person with a serious medical condition) to apply for and receive up to 21 days' protection from gas or electricity shutoff, with possible additional extensions.

Capitol Briefs is a publication of the Legal Services Association of Michigan. Published monthly by Capitol Services, Inc., it is designed to inform legal service professionals of government issues which may affect their profession. Your suggestions, questions and input are greatly appreciated. Please direct your inquires to Cara at Capitol Services, 526 Townsend St, Lansing, MI 48933.

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Ban on shut-off. An electric or gas service provider could not discontinue service to a qualifying customer with a serious medical condition (or whose household includes a person with a serious medical condition). Upon application, a qualifying customer would have to receive shut off protection for up to 21 days and could apply for one or more additional extensions.

Shut-off protection would not stop additional amounts owing from accruing. The customer would continue to be obligated to pay for services received during the period of shut-off protection, unless waived by the provider, but would *not* be responsible for late fees.