

SESSION WEEKLY

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HF2319- HF2398

SESSION WEEKLY

Session Weekly is a nonpartisan publication of Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services. During the 2007-2008 Legislative Session, each issue reports House action between Thursdays of each week, lists bill introductions and provides other information. No fee.

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On the cover: House and Senate employees enjoy a few moments outdoors March 26 as the temperature reached 81 degrees, a record high for the date.

—Photo by: Sarah Stacke



Breaking the barrier of silence

Systemic shift needed to deal with issues concerning mentally ill

PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL BATTAGLIA

By Mia Simpson

Envision this: It's late one night, and you hear a loud gasp from your bedroom. You enter the room to see your spouse lying on the floor, clutching his left arm and struggling to breathe. He thinks he's having a heart attack. You decide to drive him to the hospital and, upon arrival, you explain what's occurred. Intake says you'll have to wait — they have no beds available. You sit down, and for hours you wait, knowing your partner is suffering and there's nothing you can do.

While hard to imagine this unfolding in a medical emergency, in mental health care, adequate treatment is rarely guaranteed. The reasons vary: in the above case, if the person were instead suicidal, he or she may wait hours or days in a hospital waiting room because of shortages in inpatient psychiatric beds.

The problems

But there is no one scapegoat. A topographical view of the mental health system shows a landscape of scarcity, silos and struggle: providers aren't being reimbursed enough, issues aren't caught soon enough, services aren't connected well enough and people aren't supported holistically enough.

"We coordinate a system that fosters

fragmentation," said Ron Brand, executive director of the Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs Inc. "It's hard to have the housing, medication, therapy, rehabilitation services, school supports for kids all working off the same treatment plan and goals in a way that is coherent and reinforces another."

"Devastating" best describes what can result from a substandard system of care: families break up; children languish in school; some descent into homelessness, addiction, poverty and crime; and many will prematurely die.

"I think the most telling statistic is that people with mental illness live 25 years less than the general population," said Wes Kooistra, assistant commissioner of the

Chemical and Mental Health Services at the Department of Human Services. "This means the system is failing them."

A pathway to success

Kooistra and others are advocating a shift from an approach that treats mental illness as a social service issue to one that focuses on people's health needs first.

"Mental health treatment needs to be provided early, at the onset of symptoms, and with the same rigor and urgency as other health care diseases," Kooistra said.

Mental health advocates state one more mission: creating a pathway to success.

"We need to break down some of the barriers of isolation and loneliness. It's about bringing forward the things that make us happy in life," said Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato). "It's been about managing behavior. That's a low level of expectation, and we can do better."

Both can feel like difficult quests in a system described as "broken," "fragmented" and "under-resourced" by experts, and one where those in need refuse or are denied treatment, sometimes for months or years, because of stigma or service holes.

First Reading continued on page 4

A solution

But change brews nonetheless.

Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) sponsors HF196, a bill she describes as “a multi-session blueprint.” It’s catchall legislation that seeks to affect everybody touched by mental health issues, including providers, patients, caregivers, schools and corrections.

“HF196 recognizes that there is no silver bullet to shore up the mental health system or ensure access to all,” Greiling said. “It recognizes that we must interject money and quality into various systems and at different stages.”

Initially parceled out as 18 separate proposals, the bill was first heard in the House Mental Health Division Feb. 9, and was instead kept whole as it coursed through policy committees and finance divisions for health and human services, public safety and civil justice, education and economic competitiveness, K-12, and housing and public health. It awaits action by the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, SF148, sponsored by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

Close behind is the governor’s mental health proposal, HF1067, sponsored by Rep. Thomas Huntley (DFL-Duluth), a bill that overlaps Greiling’s in aspects relating to health care access and reimbursement increases, but is more limited in scope. It awaits action by the House Health Care and Human Services Finance Division. Its companion, SF148, sponsored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

The bills

Constructed by the Mental Health Legislative Network, a coalition of more than 20 organizations, HF196 has four major articles: criminal justice, children’s mental health, funding and miscellaneous, which includes provisions on employment, culturally competent services, police and housing.

The criminal justice system often sees the worst cases of untreated mental illness: those who become violent or homeless.

Greiling’s bill attempts to stop the revolving door by offering support for those who have been incarcerated. It would mandate mental health screening to offenders during intake to county jails.

The bill also seeks to create a council to expand crisis intervention training for police, who say they encounter and are prone to mismanaging confrontations with severely mentally ill people; protocol for timely release from solitary confinement; standards and expansion of mental health courts; and provide state health care to inmates upon release.

Furthermore, the bill outlines employment supports and incentives for providers who help mentally ill people find good, stable jobs and would allocate more funding to the Bridges Program, which provides rental subsidies for persons with serious and persistent mental illness.

“To me, there’s no such thing as recovery unless you have a home and a job,” Greiling said. And, she said, earlier management of a mental illness may mean fewer and less severe falls into homelessness, hospitals, crime, and ultimately, criminal justice.

Early screening

Problems sometimes start in youth, and Greiling proposes multiple child-based supports. They include mental health training for foster parents, because a majority of out-of-home placements occur due to behavioral problems, and increased funding for trauma-focused services; Children’s Therapeutic Services and Supports, which provide an array of mental health services; children’s mental health collaboratives; programming for at-risk children; respite care for families; and mental health screening for students, probably the most controversial piece of the legislation.

The screening program is modeled after the Columbia University TeenScreen Program, a tool that schools may administer to teen students, with parental and student consent,

that identifies the most prevalent mental health issues of that age: anxiety, depression and suicide.

EdWatch policy analyst and board member Karen Effrem contested the tool’s efficacy and cited national cases where children were falsely identified and treated for mental illness,

resulting in intense hardship and even death.

“I also want you to understand that consent is a big issue,” she told members of the House Health

“We need to break down some of the barriers of isolation and loneliness. It’s about bringing forward the things that make us happy in life.”

— Rep. Kathy Brynaert

Care and Human Services Finance Division March 27.

The dozens of other provisions in the bill look further at gaps in funding, service and health coverage, holes that HF1067 also tries to fill.

Under both bills, community mental health providers and intensive services would be slated for large rate increases, and coverage in state health care programs would be expanded to include more mental health treatments. This would help providers recoup some of the services they currently lose money on, such as family education, diagnostic assessments and care coordination and consultation. The bills also protect mental health services and benefits from future rate reductions.

Greiling’s bill proposes items for the underserved — ethnic populations, rural populations and the dually diagnosed — such as a loan forgiveness program for culturally specified providers and grants for culturally specific organizations. The bill would also fund technologies for rural providers and agencies, which often must travel great distances, and would provide more mileage reimbursement.

For people dually diagnosed as mentally ill and chemically dependent, the bill proposes a demonstration project that focuses on housing, outreach and care.

It would mandate health care for college students, who are most at-risk for mental health issues, and studies on bed capacity and employment success.

The bill would provide funding for three programs: suicide prevention, which lost state funding in 2005; crisis services; and a tracking system for mental health outcomes.

According to the preliminary fiscal note analysis, total costs to the state would be \$134 million by fiscal year 2011, with brunt of funding taken from the Department of Human Services. 

The facts

- One in four adults has a mental illness.
- Of the adults with a serious mental illness using case management, 75 percent were reported to be looking for work or not in the labor force.
- Suicide is a leading cause of violent death in Minnesota, causing four times as many deaths as homicides.
- The number one reason for out-of-home placement by counties is behavioral problems.
- Seventy percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have a serious mental illness.
- Thirty percent of children in the child welfare system have a serious mental illness.
- Twenty five percent of MFIP caregivers have a serious mental illness.
- Sixteen percent of adults in the corrections system have mental illness.
- People with mental illness, on average, live 25 years less than the general population.

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness of Minnesota and the Department of Human Services.

Editor's note: The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees held March 22-29 and other House activity. To track the progress of a bill, go to www.leg.mn and click on Bill Search, Status and MyBills. Designations used in Highlight summaries: HF-House File; SF-Senate File; CH-Chapter; and *- the bill version considered by the House, or the bill language signed by the governor.

BONDING

Bonding bill approved the first time

A conference committee is needed to reach compromise on a pair of capital investment bills.

After nearly two hours of discussion and four failed amendments, the House passed [HF886](#), sponsored by [Rep. Alice Hausman](#) (DFL-St. Paul), March 27 with an 84-45 vote. However, the Senate amended the language of its proposal, [SF2157](#), sponsored by [Sen. Keith Langseth](#) (DFL-Glyndon), into the bill one day later and sent it back to the House for concurrence, which did not occur.

This year, the first year of the biennium, is dedicated to the state's budget. Bonding for projects this year is limited to emergencies, and some members think the \$255 million House bill is too large for the off year. The Senate bill totals \$306.6 million.

"It's not our job to be Santa Claus for the State of Minnesota," [Rep. Mark Buesgens](#) (R-Jordan) said about providing \$30 million to the Red Lake School District. "They don't have a tax base, but they have casinos."

"The State of Minnesota has to educate every student in this state," said [Rep. Brita Sailer](#) (DFL-Park Rapids), who represents the Red Lake Indian Reservation. "I would keep that in mind regardless of the number of students enrolled today or tomorrow."

Of the total House package, \$135 million is bonded money and \$120 million is one-time money from the state's General Fund. An additional \$33.4 million will be provided from the state's trunk highway fund.

Some other appropriations include:

- \$52 million for higher education asset preservation and replacement between the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities;
- \$30 million for a new arena at the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center, which would, in part, be used by the mens and womens hockey programs at [University of Minnesota-Duluth](#);

- \$30 million for the final design and construction of the Central Corridor transitway between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul;
- \$12.7 million from the trunk highway fund for the exterior repair of the Department of Transportation Building in St. Paul;
- \$10 million for grants to noncommercial television stations from the General Fund to assist with the continued conversion to a digital broadcast signal as mandated by the federal government. It must also be used to interconnect Minnesota public television stations;
- \$8 million for the RIM Conservation Reserve to acquire conservation easements from landowners on marginal lands to protect soil and water quality and to support fish and wildlife habitat. Of this, \$2.25 million is to implement the program;
- \$2.5 million to the Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board to construct siphons, a conveyance system and other improvements to accommodate water level and outflow control of the water level in the Canisteo mine pit in Itasca County;
- \$2.09 million for flood mitigation grants for the city of Roseau for the state share of land acquisition, engineering and design costs for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control Project, which will protect the city from recurring flooding. This would also go for flood mitigation projects in Browns Valley; and
- \$2 million for the state's share of a high-speed rail line between St. Paul and Chicago.

— S. HEGMAN

BUDGET

Deficiency funding

Taking care of 2007 unexpected budget expenditures and unintended shortages is the intent of the deficiency funding bill. Sponsored by [Rep. Loren Solberg](#) (DFL-Grand Rapids) and [Sen. Richard Cohen](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF958/SF846](#)* is scheduled to be heard on the House floor April 2. It was passed 61-2 by the Senate March 26.

The \$10.37 million in one-time appropriations is a supplemental budget request from the governor addressing deficiencies faced by some state agencies this biennium.

More than \$7.8 million is targeted for the Metropolitan Council to fill a budgetary gap created because less than expected revenue is being generated from the motor vehicle

No Session Weekly April 6

In observance of Passover and Easter, there will be no House floor sessions or committee hearings after 2 p.m. Monday, April 2 through Monday, April 9.

Because of this, there will be no Session Weekly published Friday, April 6. Session Weekly staff will resume coverage of the House with committees and a floor session scheduled for April 10. The magazine will then resume its regular Friday publication date.

sales tax from which the organization draws funding.

The bill provides \$150,000 to the [Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board](#) to cover court-ordered payment of attorney's fees resulting from a First Amendment challenge regarding political activities relating to organizations.

While much of the case — Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life vs. Kelly — was struck down in U.S. District Court, a portion of campaign law was ruled unconstitutional, and the state was required to pay attorney's fees relating to that finding, according to Jeanne Olson, executive director of the board.

Other appropriations addressed in the bill include:

- \$1.1 million to match FEMA funds received for natural disaster assistance payments;
- \$522,000 for Greater Minnesota transit assistance;
- \$240,000 to replace funding lost to an inadvertent repeal of a state statute;
- \$200,000 to the [Board on Judicial Standards](#) for special hearing costs;
- \$200,000 to the [Board of Public Defense](#) for transcript costs;
- \$66,000 to the ombudsman for mental health and developmental disabilities; and
- \$47,000 for tax court deficiencies.

— L. SCHUTZ

CRIME

Support for victims of violence

According to U.S. Department of Justice statistics, violent crime in the United States has slowly begun to rise.

Throughout Minnesota, local government and law enforcement agencies are looking for ways to address their public safety concerns, including crime reduction and support for victims.

Sponsored by [Rep. Steve Simon](#) (DFL-St.

Louis Park), [HF1033](#) would help provide some of that support. Approved 126-1 by the House March 24, the bill awaits action by the full Senate where [Sen. Ron Latz](#) (DFL-St. Louis Park) is the Senate sponsor.

The bill would require an employer to allow a violent crime victim to take a reasonable amount of time off from work to attend criminal proceedings related to the case. This bill would also provide the same protection for the spouse or next of kin. Any employer that violates this provision would be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a civil suit.

All victims of crime need the support of family and friends, even more so during criminal proceedings, said Jennifer Nodes, executive director of the Minnesota General Crime Victim Coalition.

Dorian Eder, representing the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, said that although this type of legislation will not affect a lot of people, it is important. For some, this may not be a crisis; but if it happens to them, it's a big deal, she said.

— C. GREEN

EDUCATION

Class size ratios

Class sizes could become smaller and capped in an effort to reduce the achievement gap.

Sponsored by [Rep. Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF1317](#) would have the education commissioner establish class size ratios or use ratios established in the bill.

The House E-12 Education Committee approved the bill March 22. It now goes to the House K-12 Finance Division.

Under the ratios proposed in the bill, grades K through three classrooms would have no more than 20 students per teacher, no more than 22 students per grades four through six classroom teacher, no more than 25 students per grades seven through nine classroom teacher, and no more than 28 students per grades 10 through 12 classroom teacher. Laboratory classes for students in grades seven through 12 would have no more than 24 students per teacher.

Judy Fedo, a teacher in the Anoka-Hennepin Independent School District, said that classrooms designed for 25 students now hold 35, and teachers can't help students without having to jump over desks and students.

[Rep. Bud Nornes](#) (R-Fergus Falls) is concerned that this bill would take one more local control issue away from local school boards.

Hornstein said the intent of the bill is to be a guideline for a study, and not to dictate class sizes.

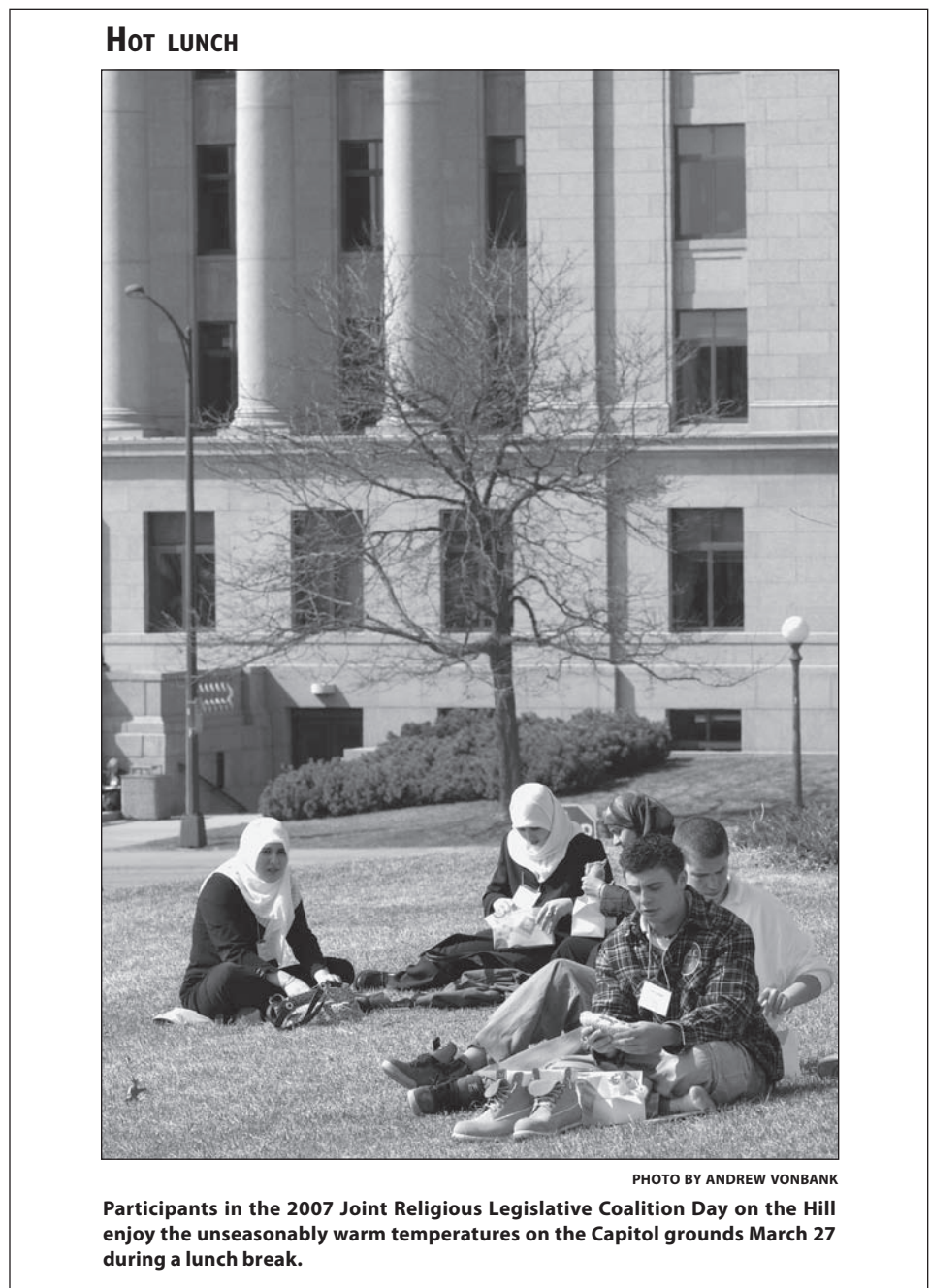


PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Participants in the 2007 Joint Religious Legislative Coalition Day on the Hill enjoy the unseasonably warm temperatures on the Capitol grounds March 27 during a lunch break.

A report would be due to the Legislature on Jan. 15 each year. It would include class-size ratios in each school district, and describe the gap between actual size and target size. The commissioner would also estimate the cost necessary to fund the schools to reduce the gap, and give recommendations for achieving class-size ratios.

A companion bill, [SF1247](#), sponsored by [Sen. Chuck Wiger](#) (DFL-North St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— S. HARDING

Fragrance free schools

Minneapolis schools could go fragrance free in an effort to curb asthma attacks by students and teachers.

Sponsored by [Rep. Karen Clark](#) (DFL-

Mpls), [HF2148](#) would create a working group to include students, teachers, a school administrator and one member of the Board of Education to recommend a campaign to inform students and parents about the potentially harmful effects of fragrance products. Also, the health commissioner would develop a fragrance free schools education pilot program.

On March 23, the House E-12 Education Committee approved the bill and referred it to the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division, which held it over March 28 for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

Hattie Bonds, assistant principal at Patrick Henry High School, said she has seen increased cases of asthma among students. "You can't

learn if you can't breathe, and you can't live if you can't breathe," she said.

"The American Lung Association said that fragrances do trigger asthma attacks," she said.

Cassandra Morgan, a junior at Columbia Heights High School, researched the chemicals found in perfumes and shaving gel and said that some contain carcinogens. "Some of the side effects I found were irritated eyes and nose, and upper respiratory problems."

According to a written statement from the Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association there is no scientific evidence linking fragrances and scented products to any adverse health effects.

A companion bill, [SF1956](#), sponsored by [Sen. Patricia Torres Ray](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Health, Housing, and Family Security Committee.

— S. HARDING

Congress needs to pay up

Two resolutions urging Congress to come up with the money for two underfunded federal mandates forced upon the states are working their way through the House and Senate.

Sponsored by [Rep. Mindy Greiling](#) (DFL-Roseville) and [Sen. Chuck Wiger](#) (DFL-North St. Paul), [HF89/SF13](#)* would memorialize the president and Congress to carry through on their pledge to fund 40 percent of special education costs. The resolution, passed 61-0 in the Senate Feb. 26, was approved March 23 by the House E-12 Education Committee and sent to the House floor.

In 1975, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which provides framework for providing free, public education to all students regardless the level of their disability.

Congress is supposed to fund 40 percent of special education costs, yet Minnesota has never received more than 18 percent of its costs, according to the resolution.

Also receiving committee approval was [HF258](#), sponsored by Greiling, that would memorialize Congress to offer greater flexibility to the states, and fully fund the No Child Left Behind Act as part of its reauthorization. It has been sent to the floor. A companion, [SF28](#), sponsored by Wiger, awaits action by the Senate Rules and Administration Committee.

According to the Office of the Legislative Auditor, NCLB will cause 80 percent to 100 percent of Minnesota elementary schools to fail the adequate yearly progress requirements by 2014. The resolution asks Congress to give the states greater flexibility to investigate schools not making adequate progress and what needs to be improved.

The resolution also states NCLB may be constitutionally illegal, because education is not a power delegated to the federal government.

— S. HARDING

Wind power

Besides teaching students, schools could be generating energy.

A bill sponsored by [Rep. Aaron Peterson](#) (DFL-Appleton) would allow schools to increase the amount of wind energy conversions they can produce.

[HF1642](#) would increase the limit on what school boards can "construct, acquire, own in whole or in part, operate, and sell and retain and spend the payment received from selling wind energy from a wind energy conversion system." The current level is 3.3 megawatts; the bill would move it to 10 megawatts.

The House E-12 Education Committee approved the bill March 22 and sent it the House floor.

Ted Suss, superintendent of Wabasso Public School, suggested the increase so that every time there is an upgrade, a school board doesn't have to ask the Legislature for a bump in capacity.

Fourteen Minnesota school districts applied for \$3 million in clean renewable energy bonds from the federal government, and formed a joint powers entity earlier this month to collectively produce 46.2 megawatts of capacity. The plan is to build one wind farm, which would save money for individual schools.

"Building a wind tower behind the school or any single site, even if you're up in the two to three megawatt range, doesn't make a whole lot of sense," Suss said.

A companion bill, [SF1635](#), sponsored by [Sen. Gary Kubly](#) (DFL-Granite Falls), was laid over March 22 by the Senate Energy, Utilities, Technology, and Communications Committee for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

— S. HARDING

EMPLOYMENT

No mandatory nurse overtime

Nurses employed at most state facilities could have the same ability to say no to extra work as those in the private sector.

Sponsored by [Rep. Larry Howes](#) (R-Walker) and [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF966*/SF817](#) was approved 121-10 by the House March 27. It was amended and passed 53-12 by the Senate the same day. The House refused to concur with the changes March 29 and a conference committee has been requested to work out the differences.

A 2002 law allows a nurse to refuse



PHOTO BY SARAH STACKE

Hundreds of nurses gather at the Capitol on March 27 in support of Citizens Action for Nurse and Patient Safety. "Nurses Day on the Hill" brought together many care providers to promote nurse staffing and patient safety as legislators discuss funding priorities.

mandatory overtime without consequences from their employer if they feel tired or sick and believe it is in the best interest of the nurse and patients not to have that person in a caregiver role during those hours. Prior to the law, nurses felt they were being forced into too many overtime hours because of intimidation.

According to Howes, the Minnesota Hospital Association has had no problems since the law was enacted; however, the [Department of Corrections](#) said it doesn't need to honor the law.

The bill adds to the law nurses employed by the state if the nurse is involved in resident or patient care, regardless of the type of facility where the nurse is employed or the facility's license.

Because of the large fiscal impact if it were included, the department would be exempt from the bill. "Maybe we'll deal with that next year," Howes said.

The bill does not supersede a valid collective bargaining agreement.

Admitting it could be a good policy, [Rep. Chris DeLaForest](#) (R-Andover), one of the no votes, expressed concern that it was not negotiated at the bargaining table, like most other employment terms.

— M. COOK

Earning a check with assistance

Minnesotans want to be paid for a day's work.

Sponsored by [Rep. A. "Willie" Dominguez](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF924](#) would prohibit an employment contract that requires an individual to perform unpaid work in return for cash assistance from the [Minnesota Family Investment Program](#), unless the individual agrees in writing to perform the work.

Approved by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division March 22, the bill awaits action on the House floor. A companion bill, [SF514](#), sponsored by [Sen. David Tomassoni](#) (DFL-Chisholm), awaits action by the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee.

Administered by the [Department of Human Services](#), the program provides cash assistance and employment and training services to eligible families with children.

Parents receiving benefits who are able to work must do so. If a job pays too little to support a family, wages can be combined with reduced assistance.

A 2005 federal law changed the definition of work activity, which allows for unpaid work to be performed in return for welfare, if private sector employment is unavailable.

Linden Gawboy, a member of the Welfare Rights Committee, said that workfare could hurt all working people.

"It would serve to drive down wages and displace workers. Workfare is a direct attack on working people as a whole, on organized labor and on organizing efforts," she said.

In a written statement, Phyllis Walker, president of AFSCME Local 3800, said people should not be penalized because of their situation.

"Welfare recipients want to work, they want to have health insurance, they want to earn vacation and sick leave and they deserve to be paid a living wage. Unfortunately, in our economy there are not enough living wage jobs to go around and that is why they are forced to support their families with welfare."

— M. Cook

ENERGY

E-filing for utilities

The [Public Utilities Commission](#) allows utility companies to file documents electronically, but until recently, existing language in statute was still geared toward the old

paper-only system. A new law, signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty March 27, corrects the problem.

Signed
by
the
governor

Speaking on the House floor, [Rep. Sheldon Johnson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), the House sponsor, said the law will amend language in state law governing the PUC's administrative practices. He called it a "technical bill," and said it was brought forth by the PUC. [Sen. Rick Olseen](#) (DFL-Harris) is the Senate sponsor.

"It's basically just a faster, easier and more efficient way of bringing us into the 21st century for Internet use of filings," Johnson said.

[Rep. Mark Buesgens](#) (R-Jordan) expressed concern that the law does not sufficiently address privacy concerns. Johnson replied that the issue of privacy had not been raised by the PUC or the Department of Commerce.

The law takes effect Aug. 1, 2007.

[HF1678/SF1294](#)*/CH10

— N. Busse

Solar power for the needy?

Minnesotans eligible for low-income weatherization assistance from the state could soon have a new option to help save with their energy costs: solar power.

Sponsored by [Rep. Brita Sailer](#) (DFL-Park Rapids), [HF2137](#) would allow the [Department of Commerce](#) to provide grants to install solar heating equipment in households eligible for the state's weatherization assistance program. The House Energy Finance and Policy Division held an informational hearing on the bill March 23 and included it in the omnibus energy finance bill, passed March 28 by the division.

Sailer said Minnesota has a "persistent problem" of low-income residents not being able to afford winter heating. The bill would allow renewable energy to be added to the list of options the state has to provide energy assistance, she said.

Jason Edens, representing the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, said that while energy assistance is needed for low-income families, merely providing them with subsidies is not a long-term solution.

"Families who are outfitted with renewable heating systems on their homes no longer need to rely upon energy assistance. A properly sized and installed solar heating system can eliminate the need for a family's energy assistance budget by offsetting their winter space-heating needs substantially," he said.

Sailer said that funding for the grants would be provided by existing revenues from a petroleum product inspection fee currently used to fund an oil-burner retrofit assistance program that has been "underutilized."

There is no Senate companion.

— N. Busse

ENVIRONMENT

Finance bill approved

Parks and trails, invasive species programs, the Clean Water Legacy Act and numerous other programs and agencies would see a funding increase under the provisions of this year's omnibus environment and natural resources finance bill.

[HF1651](#), sponsored by [Rep. Jean Wagenius](#) (DFL-Mpls), would appropriate more than \$346 million over the next two fiscal years. The House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division approved the bill March 29 and sent it to the House Finance Committee.

In addition to providing base appropriations for the Department of Natural Resources, Pollution Control Agency and others, the bill would ramp up funding for a number of new and current initiatives, including:

- \$47.1 million in new funding to various agencies for restoring impaired waters under the provisions of the Clean Water Legacy Act;
- \$3.2 million in new funds for combating and controlling invasive species;
- \$1.5 million in additional funds for metropolitan regional parks and another \$1.5 million for state trails maintenance and operations;
- \$750,000 for monitoring endocrine disruptors in surface waters; and
- \$150,000 to help control tree pests.

Among the bill's more controversial provisions is a section that would ban the development of new 4x4 truck trails on state-owned lands in Beltrami, Cass, Crow Wing and Hubbard counties. [Rep. Frank Moe](#) (DFL-Bemidji) successfully amended the provision onto the bill. [Rep. Tom Hackbarth](#) (R-Cedar) called it "ludicrous."

Another controversial section of the bill would tighten the state's requirements for replacing wetlands. Hackbarth moved to eliminate the section from the bill, but that motion was defeated on a vote of 9-8.

The bill would also add a \$1 surcharge onto deer hunting licenses to fund a program that would allow hunters to donate deer meat to food assistance programs for the needy.

A companion bill, [SF1781](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— N. Busse

MPCA bill in limbo

A bill that would modify the governing structure of the [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](#) was approved by a House committee, but appears unlikely to progress any further this year.

[HF294](#), sponsored by [Rep. Joe Mullery](#) (DFL-Mpls), would modify the MPCA Citizens' Board, which sets the direction and policy of the agency. Currently, the board is made up of eight members and the commissioner, who serves as its chair. The bill would remove the commissioner from the board, add another citizen member, and grant more power to the board.

The bill was approved March 22 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee. It now goes to the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee — but that committee is not currently scheduled to meet again this session.

Mullery said that when the MPCA was created in 1967, the commissioner was subordinate to the board. He said the roles were later reversed, and his bill seeks to restore the board and the commissioner to their original respective roles.

Grant Merritt, a former MPCA executive director (in the past, the equivalent of a commissioner), said the commissioner used to serve essentially as an administrator for the board, but was given greatly expanded powers in 1996.

"There still is a board, but they hardly have any functions, and they really are not policy-making decision makers anymore," Merritt said, adding that the old system was more efficient and more transparent.

The bill was originally to be re-referred to the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division and rolled into its omnibus bill, but that motion was changed after several Republicans on the committee objected to what they saw as bypassing the normal committee process.

A companion bill, [SF1876](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee.

— N. BUSSE

Cleaning up dish soap

The dishwasher detergent under your sink may clean your dishes, but it also contains approximately 8 percent phosphorus — a nutrient that will eventually work its way through your local wastewater system and help pollute Minnesota's surface waters.

A bill (HF1382), sponsored by [Rep. Paul Thissen](#) (DFL-Mpls), would address the problem by banning the sale of household dish detergents containing more than 0.5 percent phosphorus by July 1, 2010. Approved March 22 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, the bill is headed to the House floor.

Phosphorus pollution in surface waters

leads to an excessive production of algae, causing normally clear bodies of water to become cloudy. A 2004 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency [report](#) states that residential automatic dishwasher detergents account for approximately 1.9 percent of all such pollution in the state.

Thissen called the bill a "fairly substantial step forward" in dealing with the issue, and noted that it was brought forward by the dishwasher detergent manufacturers themselves.

Dennis Griesing, vice president of government affairs for the Soap and Detergent Association, said the detergent industry is pursuing similar legislation in several other states. He said that the 0.5 percent figure represents the traditional "trace element" standard, and further explained that the 2010 effective date is necessary because the industry has not yet found suitable alternatives to phosphorus and needs time to innovate.

The bill would only affect residential dishwasher detergents, not commercial detergents. Griesing said that because the health standards and dishwashing machinery are different in a commercial environment, alternatives to phosphorus cannot be used.

[Rep. Jean Wagenius](#) (DFL-Mpls) expressed concern that chemicals containing endocrine disruptors — contaminants that cause male fish to take on female sexual characteristics — might be substituted in place of the phosphorus. Griesing replied that his industry is "very aware of the debate around endocrine disruptors," and promised to repeat Wagenius's concerns to his association.

A companion bill, [SF1109](#), sponsored by [Sen. Tom Saxhaug](#) (DFL-Grand Rapids), was held over March 28 by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

— N. BUSSE

Hazard awareness

Minnesota has not done a good job of consistently tracking environmental toxins and their connection to human disease, according to the Trust for America's Health, a national advocacy group.

The organization gave the state an "F" in 2000, later raising the grade to a "C" after it applied for a grant with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

[HF1621](#), sponsored by [Rep. Julie Bunn](#) (DFL-Lake Elmo) would appropriate approximately \$2 million to address the problem. The bill calls for a program for environmental health tracking and a pilot program for bio-monitoring, to test tissues and fluids for toxins. It would also create an advisory panel to oversee the efforts.

The bill was approved by the House Housing

Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division March 23 and sent to the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division.

Bunn said the goal would be to develop a system that would provide information about the relationship between environmental hazards and disease, and to develop strategies to prevent those diseases.

The issue is personal to Bunn, whose district has been affected by chemicals linked to 3M. The company is currently involved in a civil suit brought by affected residents in Washington County.

Environmental contaminants have been linked to cancer, asthma, adverse reproductive outcomes, nervous system diseases and childhood developmental and behavioral problems, said Samuel Yamin, public health scientist for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. "Chronic diseases impose a huge cost to society in terms of health and economics," he said.

A companion bill, [SF1074](#), sponsored by [Rep. Katie Sieben](#) (DFL-Newport) was included in the Senate omnibus environment, natural resources and energy bill. Passed 61-2 by the Senate on March 27, the bill awaits action in the House Finance Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

FAMILY

Background check provisions

Signed
by
the
governor

Placing children in a new home is a delicate matter.

If there is any concern that the person taking the children in has a record, local authorities or a social services official must

do a background check. This check would involve a submission of fingerprints to the [Bureau of Criminal Apprehension](#) that will in turn obtain a criminal history from the National Criminal Records Repository.

Under a new law, signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty March 27, in emergency situations, a social services agency or county attorney may request a name-based check from the national database.

The law, sponsored by [Rep. Sheldon Johnson](#) (DFL-St. Paul) and [Sen. Mee Moua](#) (DFL-St. Paul), does place conditions on this inquiry.

Within 15 calendar days of the name-based check, fingerprints of the individual must be forwarded to the BCA for submission to the FBI. If the individual refuses to provide fingerprints, the child or children must be removed from the home.

The law is effective Aug. 1, 2007.

[HF1008*/SF985/CH8](#)

— C. GREEN

State government finance omnibus

The House State Government Finance Division's omnibus bill, sponsored by [Rep. Phyllis Kahn](#) (DFL-Mpls), would appropriate \$574.7 million from the General Fund compared to the governor's recommendation of \$646.4 million.

Much of the funding proposed in [HF953](#) would support the initial staffing and general costs associated with state agencies. The bill assumes \$104 million in revenue gains from technology carryforward funds, the governor's and House tax compliance initiatives and audit fees.

The division approved the bill March 29 and forwarded it to the House Finance Committee.

A companion bill, [SF1997](#), sponsored by [Sen. Don Betzold](#) (DFL-Fridley), was approved 42-20 March 24 by the Senate.

Policy changes in the House bill would include election initiatives, such as automatic voter registration when applying for a driver's license, allowing for lease agreements to be used as forms of identification for Election Day registration, providing voter registration and active status information on the [Office of the Secretary of State](#) Web site, and allowing for ongoing absentee status for any eligible voter.

New commissions would be created including the Minnesota Office of Ethnic Heritage and New Americans and the Legislative Commission on Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness. According to the bill, the heritage office would "assist state government to foster an understanding and appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity in Minnesota."

The House and Senate would be required to adopt rules requiring committees of the same jurisdictions to meet at coordinating times. Both bodies would receive an appropriation of one-time technology money that is not included in the governor's recommendation. Also, all legislative bills would be printed on 8.5x11 paper, and parking in front of the Capitol would be reserved for the public. Currently, the area is reserved for Senate members and some staff during session.

Under the House plan, the governor would be required to reduce the number of state commissioners to save more than \$8 million over the next two biennia. The governor would also be "encouraged to submit a state of the state address" by January of each odd-numbered year and announce any major policy initiatives.

Astronomers and sky lovers will be pleased to see a provision that would set state standards for outdoor lighting fixtures to help decrease light pollution in the night sky. The

standards would include a requirement that "full consideration has been given to energy conservation and savings, reducing glare, minimizing light pollution, and preserving the natural night environment."

— P. OSTBERG

Open meeting law changes

Meetings by some public bodies could be conducted legally by telephone or electronic means during declared emergencies, under a bill approved March 22 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Andy Welti](#) (DFL-Plainview), [HF1303](#) would allow for these meetings without violating the state's open meeting law, if certain conditions are met, including:

- the presiding officer, chief legal counsel or chief administrative officer for the governing body determines the in-person meeting is not practical because of a health pandemic or declared emergency;
- all participating members, wherever their physical location, can hear one another and all discussion and testimony;
- people present at the regular meeting location can hear all discussion, testimony and all votes;
- at least one member of the body is physically present at the meeting location, unless it's unfeasible due to a pandemic or emergency; and
- all votes are conducted by roll call, so each vote can be identified and recorded.

Gary Carlson, director of intergovernmental relations for the League of Minnesota Cities, said many cities, counties and school districts have been in the process of preparing for a pandemic flu outbreak and there is no clear authorization to conduct a meeting electronically.

The bill now goes to the House floor.

A companion bill, [SF1165](#), sponsored by [Sen. Rick Olseen](#) (DFL-Harris), awaits action on the Senate floor.

— P. OSTBERG

Pay equity in all contracts

Companies with more than 40 full-time employees entering into state contracts in excess of \$100,000 would be required to comply with pay equity laws, under a bill heard March 27 by the House State Government Finance Division.

Sponsored by [Rep. Phyllis Kahn](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF1440](#) would require the commissioner of human rights to approve businesses plans to establish equitable compensation for employees. Upon approval, a two-year certificate of compliance would be issued. The

\$75 certificate would be required of businesses applying for state contracts issued on or after July 1, 2007, in excess of \$100,000.

The bill is included in the committee's omnibus bill. A companion bill, [SF1061](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action in the Senate Finance Committee.

Under the bill, until July 1, 2008, businesses not in compliance but "making a good faith effort" may be issued a certificate upon submitting to the commissioner of employee relations the following:

- a statement of the business' intention to prepare a pay equity report by July 1, 2008, and information on the business' current status;
- a statement on the existence of a company-wide job evaluation system; and
- the number of male and female employees; and expressed interest in receiving training on how to establish equitable compensation relationships.

Bonnie Watkins, representing the Pay Equity Coalition of Minnesota, said the bill would "ensure that there is not a pattern for lower pay for jobs performed by women." The proposed change would accompany other requirements on businesses that contract with the state, such as affirmative action plans and other pay equity laws, she said.

Representing the Minnesota Employment Law Council, Robert Reinhart said the bill wouldn't allow businesses to adjust wage rates for employment positions according to the market supply and demand. Current laws already address corporate discrimination, he said.

State government should set the example of pay equity, but should not place those requirements on the private sector as an unfunded mandate, said [Rep. Steve Sviggum](#) (R-Kenyon).

The bill only requires businesses to do an evaluation of pay equity and make advances towards equity, said [Rep. Ryan Winkler](#) (DFL-Golden Valley).

— P. OSTBERG

Sustainable growth working group

A new group could promote collaboration on the state and local levels toward long-term environmental and economic development initiatives.

Sponsored by [Rep. Jim Davnie](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF2252](#) is included in the House State Government Finance Division omnibus bill. It would establish a Sustainable Growth Working Group to identify strategies for implementing policies relating to transportation, natural resource preservation, economic development and sustainability at state and local levels. A

report would be due to the Legislature on Feb. 1, 2008.

According to the bill, "The working group must identify sustainable development principles that will guide decision making in Minnesota."

The group would consist of four legislators, nine commissioners from various state agencies and up to 12 members of the public.

They would study how "communities across the state can coordinate state resources to look at more efficiently planning and thinking about the state's role in the global economy," Davnie told the division March 27.

Warren Hanson, president of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, said the group would take a comprehensive look at the state's public investments for economic prosperity and sustainability goals, and then compare them to other states.

A companion bill, [SF2033](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ann Rest](#) (DFL-New Hope), awaits action in the Senate Rules and Administration Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Covering all children

Providing health care to all children is a value that [Rep. Paul Thissen](#) (DFL-Mpls) believes most Minnesotans possess.

His bill, [HF1](#), would narrowly miss the mark, covering 53,000 of the 70,000 uninsured children in Minnesota by 2011.

The House Health Care and Human Services Finance Division laid the proposal over for possible omnibus bill inclusion March 27. It has no Senate companion.

Known as the Children's Health Security Act, it acts in two phases: seeking to cover all children below 225 percent of federal poverty guidelines by October 2008, and increasing eligibility to children under 300 percent of the guidelines by January 2011. This is a change from the bill's original language, which sought coverage for children at 300 percent by the 2008 deadline.

"This is much less expensive," he said.

Still included are provisions that remove current barriers to coverage, such as long forms, and the appointment of a task force to study the issue.

[Rep. Jim Abeler](#) (R-Anoka) said while he shares Thissen's goal, he worries about the bill's effect on small health care providers, who didn't get the rate increase in the bill that he thinks they need.

"They can't work at these prices," he said. "This is not a small matter."

— M. SIMPSON

WOMEN'S HISTORY



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Dressed as suffragists, Sarah French, left, and Mary Brown paraded at the Woman Suffrage Memorial Garden on the grounds of the Capitol March 24 to commemorate Women's History Month. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was approved that gave women the right to vote in elections.

New licensing standards

A hodgepodge of new licensing standards for a variety of health providers is headed to the House floor.

Sponsored by [Rep. Cy Thao](#) (DFL-St. Paul) and [Sen. John Marty](#) (DFL-Roseville), [HF57/SF26*](#) addresses X-ray operators, speech-language pathologists and audiologists, social workers and physical therapist assistants.

The bill was approved March 22 by the House Health and Human Services Committee. It was approved 63-0 by the Senate Feb. 19.

It would force incoming X-ray operators to take a nationally-certified test starting in 2008, as was in a bill offered by [Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba](#) (DFL-Long Prairie); it would make accreditation requirements more flexible for graduates of foreign medical schools, an initiative of [Rep. Tina Liebling](#) (DFL-Rochester); and it would extend expiration dates for the Board of Medical Practice's advisory board, an effort of [Rep. Paul Thissen](#) (DFL-Mpls).

The bill also includes a proposal from [Rep. Neva Walker](#) (DFL-Mpls) to open complaint options to family members and caregivers of patients for all health-related boards, and one from [Rep. Kim Norton](#) (DFL-Rochester) that would change licensing and other requirements for physical therapist assistants.

Legislation sponsored by [Rep. Jim Abeler](#) (R-Anoka) took up the largest portion of the

omnibus bill. It includes tougher education standards for speech-language pathologists and audiologists, and major changes to codes for social workers and professional clinical counselors in areas such as licensure, graduate requirements, training, continuing education and supervisory hours.

"The social workers and the [Board of Behavioral Health and Therapy](#) had done work as a result of a task force last year," Abeler said. "And this was the sum of that work."

— M. SIMPSON

Learning about lice treatment

Lindane is an insecticide that has been used to treat lice and scabies for more than five decades. But according to [Rep. Karen Clark](#) (DFL-Mpls), sponsor of [HF917](#), small insects aren't the only ones threatened by the treatment.

"On small children, the dose is of great concern," she said. "The EPA (which withdrew registration of the chemical for agricultural use in 2006) called it the most toxic, persistent, bio-cumulative pesticide ever registered."

Clark's bill would have the commissioner of health create a stakeholder committee, to include at least one environmental health scientist and at least one parent advocate, to review scientific literature on the health effects of Lindane on children, and to report findings to the Legislature by January 2008.

She said the proposal specifically targets its use for lice.

"There are millions of families who use this treatment every day," she said, adding that 52 countries have banned use of Lindane.

Robert Tennesen, a lobbyist for Morton Grove Pharmaceuticals Inc., called Clark's research "junk science," and said medications with the chemical offer an important alternative for tough cases of lice and scabies.

"It's been approved for use since 1951," he said. "The Food and Drug Administration, the EPA, the Centers for Disease Control, the American Pediatric Association — all these groups have studied this issue, and they prescribe the results."

Heard by the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division March 28, the bill was laid over for possible omnibus inclusion. Its companion, [SF765](#), sponsored by [Sen. Linda Berglin](#) (DFL-Mpls) awaits action by the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

Smoking ban proposal still lit

A motion to move Minnesota's statewide smoking ban proposal, [HF305](#), to the House floor didn't stick March 26.

The House Finance Committee, instead, chose to approve and send the bill to the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Finance Division, after adding language proposed by [Rep. Tom Rukavina](#) (DFL-Virginia) for employees who lose their job because of the ban.

Sponsored by [Rep. Thomas Huntley](#) (DFL-Duluth), the bill would prohibit smoking in all public places beginning in January 2009.

[Rep. Dan Severson](#) (R-Sauk Rapids) characterized the issue as one of public health, quoting a Surgeon General's report: "Secondhand smoke causes disease and premature death for children and adults who do not smoke."

Opinions were split across party lines, nonetheless, particularly on the issue of private rights.

"Applying your logic, it's OK for somebody who isn't a resident to vote in this country, but an 80-year-old veteran who fought in World War II, a 70-year-old veteran who fought in Korea and a 60-year-old veteran who fought in Vietnam can't make their own decision to smoke in their VFW club," Rukavina said.

[Rep. Torrey Westrom](#) (R-Elbow Lake) attempted to amend the bill twice, the second time seeking to give local governments the option of exempting bars that have met certain conditions, such as installed ventilation systems and enclosed smoking

areas. The amendment failed, but then was adopted after being reoffered by [Rep. Larry Howes](#) (R-Walker), who imposed tighter language on conditions.

The companion bill, [SF238](#), sponsored by [Sen. Katheen Sheran](#) (DFL-Mankato), was passed 41-24 by the Senate March 27.

— M. SIMPSON

Helping jailed addicts

A bill to ensure more timely chemical use assessments for people in jail was approved by the House Health and Human Services Committee March 22, and sent to the House Health Care and Human Services Finance Division.

[Rep. Doug Magnus](#) (R-Slayton) said he sponsored [HF499](#) for people like his son, who admitted himself into a year-long treatment program for methamphetamine addiction. The legislation would require that counties assess those jailed in their facilities if a drug abuse assessment, or Rule 25, is not provided by counties of residence within three weeks

of incarceration.

Counties of residence — where the inmates lived before the arrest — are currently mandated to complete assessments regardless of where sentencing takes place, but Joel Alter, program manager for the Office of the Legislative Auditor, said counties are struggling to keep up.

"We're hearing about cases where weeks and months go by, and no assessment," he said. "We're looking for a more structured, effective approach."

The bill also seeks to expand duties of the human services commissioner related to chemical health, to include:

- closer monitoring of Rule 25 compliance;
- distribution of best practice information to assessors and local agencies;
- more materials on abuse interventions; and
- projects, such as a directory of licensed treatment programs, for online utilization.

The commissioner is also asked to develop a plan by January 2008 to improve community-based treatment programs and to make recommendations on behalf of the consolidated chemical treatment fund, which pays for treatment of low-income individuals.

A companion bill, [SF532](#), sponsored by [Sen. Julie Rosen](#) (R-Fairmont), could be considered for omnibus bill inclusion by the Senate Health and Human Services Budget Division.

— M. SIMPSON

DOULA OPTION



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rhonda Speers-White of Minneapolis, a certified doula, testifies before the House Health and Human Services Committee March 23 in support of a bill that would require doula services health insurance coverage and doula presence upon request added to the patient bill of rights.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Immigrant tuition

Emmanuel Rojas moved to America with his family at age 3. Now a high school sophomore, he is thinking about studying criminal justice in college.

Without citizenship, he and other immigrants must pay out-of-state tuition at most colleges and universities in the state, which can add thousands of dollars to the price tag. That could prohibit some students from attending a postsecondary institution.

"It's not like every year I can come up with \$20,000 or \$30,000 for college," he said. Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for financial aid.

Sponsored by [Rep. Carlos Mariani](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF722](#) would help students like Rojas chase their dreams. Heard March 22 by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division, most of the bill is included in the omnibus higher education and work force development finance bill.

As amended into the omnibus bill, students would be eligible for in-state tuition at all public higher education institutions in Minnesota, if they meet three criteria: at least three years of attendance at a Minnesota high school, graduation from a state high school or attainment of a GED in the state, and registration or enrollment at a public higher education institution. In the original bill, but not the omnibus bill, is a provision whereby a student without lawful immigration status would need to have filed an affidavit indicating they have filed an application to legalize their citizenship or will at the earliest opportunity they are eligible to do so.

"This is a way to legally allow our education of students to go forward, just as we do with K-12 students," Mariani said. States are required to provide a K-12 education to all students.

Not everyone was supportive.

"The bill is an illegal alien tuition scheme," said Minneapolis resident Dell Erickson. "This bill shamelessly places the interests of illegal aliens above American families and lawful residents who have paid taxes and played by the rules."

A companion bill, [SF653](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), was included in the Senate omnibus higher education bill ([SF1989](#)) that was approved 64-2 March 22 and awaits action by the House Finance Committee.

— M. Cook

Omnibus bill gets division OK

A plan has been offered to help students with rising education costs, assist the state in its quest to be a biotechnology leader and address the health care worker shortage.

The omnibus higher education and work force development finance bill was approved by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division March 28. It is scheduled to be heard by the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Finance Division March 30.

"The days of double-digit tuition increases are over," said [Rep. Tom Rukavina](#) (DFL-Virginia), the division chairman and sponsor of [HF797](#). He said tuition has increased more than 70 percent in the past five years.

The \$3.36 billion bill calls for a \$396 million increase in higher education investment, including \$36.5 million in technology improvements. It calls for a 2 percent cap on tuition increases each year at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and requests the University of Minnesota decrease its potential tuition hikes. It also calls for a potential textbook rental program and other cost saving measures.

Because of the increased funding for the



PHOTO BY TOM OLSMSCHIED

Goldy, the mascot at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, was on hand for a March 28 rally in the Rotunda as part of "Support the U Day" at the Capitol.

systems, [Rep. Dan Severson](#) (R-Sauk Rapids) offered an amendment to freeze tuition for the next two years. It was defeated on a party-line vote.

Further, the bill includes a \$60 million increase in financial aid, although only \$12 million is in new money. The remainder comes from altering some formulas to the student's benefit.

A plan that would give in-state tuition to undocumented immigrant students living in Minnesota, was not in the initial bill, but was successfully amended onto it by [Rep. Karen Clark](#) (DFL-Mpls). The provision is in the Senate omnibus bill, [SF1989](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul). Approved 64-2 March 22 that bill awaits action by the House Finance Committee.

While saying the entire package is "a good bill with a lot of good things in it," [Rep. Bud Nornes](#) (R-Fergus Falls) warned that the entire proposal could be vetoed by [Gov. Tim Pawlenty](#) because it contains the so-called "Dream Act."

In order to keep the state on track to be a bioscience leader, the House bill includes \$45 million in initiatives.

"It keeps Minnesota on track to maintain our leadership in cutting edge technology," said [Rep. Tim Mahoney](#) (DFL-St. Paul). "This is a bill that makes tomorrow's jobs possible in Minnesota."

The bill even tries to help the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame by adding a 25-cent surcharge to every

ticket for an NCAA Division I men's hockey event in the state. Revenue would be used to assist the hall, provided it remains in Eveleth.

— M. Cook

Saving money on textbooks

College students that face rising tuition costs and decreased financial aid are sometimes getting sticker shock when purchasing necessary textbooks.

Some potential assistance is included in the omnibus higher education and work force development finance bill.

"This bill is an effective attempt to show what the changes are to a textbook and create a textbook rental project," [Rep. Frank Moe](#) (DFL-Bemidji), the sponsor of [HF1508](#), told the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division March 22.

It would require that publishers disclose to the students and faculty on a Web site, in a publication or in writing, upon request, the changes made to a textbook, so it can be known if new editions are warranted. It would also direct the [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities](#) system to create one or more textbook rental pilot programs to be implemented in the 2008-09 year.

According to the Minnesota State College Student Association, average college textbook prices increased 186 percent between December 1986 and December 2004; whereas, inflation increased 72 percent.

Bruce Hildebrand, the Association of American Publishers' executive director for higher education, said the association supports transparency, but the bill is asking for things that cannot be met. He also said that the problem oftentimes is with professors.

For example, he said 216 introduction to psychology books are on the market, ranging from \$23.50 to \$120.50 at retail, which doesn't include electronic, hybrid or custom books. "All told, a faculty member might see 5,000 options for this one course. The disconnect is the students only see what the faculty has chosen, and their choice becomes new, used or don't buy the book," said Hildebrand, adding that the requirements could force small publishers to no longer do business in Minnesota, thereby driving up costs.

Hildebrand noted that a recent report by the Used Textbook Association showed that during a four-year period only 4.5 percent of the 178,000 books they sold were issued in new editions.

A companion bill, [SF1314](#), sponsored by [Sen. Chuck Wiger](#) (DFL-North St. Paul), was included in the Senate omnibus higher education bill ([SF1989](#)), passed 64-2 March 22 awaits action by the House Finance Committee.

— M. Cook

HUMANITIES

Past preservation, forward thinking

[Explore Minnesota Tourism](#) could still see additional advertising money from the state, but it won't come from the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission's budget.

So decided the House Minnesota Heritage Finance Division, which approved its omnibus bill March 26. Sponsored by [Rep. Mike Jaros](#) (DFL-Duluth), [HF1660](#) now moves to the House Finance Committee.

The amendment, proposed by [Rep. Brita Sailer](#) (DFL-Park Rapids), to take \$250,000 from the commission and give it to Explore Minnesota Tourism to promote the state's seasonal recreation was withdrawn, but discussion could still ensue later.

"I just want to make sure we have an adequate tourism budget," Sailer said.

For the 2008-09 biennium, Explore Minnesota Tourism could see \$24.25 million from the state, and the commission could see \$747,000. Of that, \$67,000 per year would be a one-time appropriation for an additional event development position, plus expenses, said Paul Erickson, the commission's executive director.

The \$125.6 million bill would also give \$1.1 million to the Indian Affairs Council, of which \$80,000 would be used in the first year of the biennium for the purchase of an Indian burial site in Becker County. Also, \$100,000 in the first year would be used for a grant for the Dakota/Ojibwe Language Revitalization Project to expand the program for American Indian children who do not live on an Indian reservation.

Other biennium appropriations include:

- \$53.47 million for the Minnesota Historical Society for education and outreach, preservation and access, and pass-through appropriations for various groups in the state;
- \$14.5 million for the Minnesota Zoological Board, of which \$275,000 is a one-time appropriation;
- \$6.2 million for public broadcasting, which will be used for grants for various equipment needs; and
- \$1 million for the Minnesota Humanities Commission, of which 10 percent in each year is for lifelong learning programs in Greater Minnesota communities that do not receive financial support from other large educational institutions.

A companion bill, [SF1619](#), sponsored by [Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon](#) (DFL-Duluth), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— S. HEGMAN

INSURANCE

Minimum limits changed

Signed
by
the
governor

General liability insurance minimums for licensed building contractors will be changed because of a new law signed March 27 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

Sponsored by [Rep. Joe Atkins](#) (DFL-Inver Grove Heights) and [Sen. Dan Sparks](#) (DFL-Austin), the law requires licensed manufactured home installers and roofers to have general liability insurance policy minimums of at least:

- \$100,000 per occurrence, \$300,000 aggregate limit for bodily injury and \$25,000 for property damage, or
- \$300,000 single limit for bodily injury and property damage of \$300,000 for occurrence and aggregate limits.

Previous minimums were set at \$100,000 per occurrence, which included \$10,000 in property damage coverage.

Also under the law, licensees must have on file with the commissioner of labor and industry a certificate evidencing insurance. The certificate provides that the insurance cannot be cancelled without the insurer first giving 15 days written notice to the commissioner.

The law is effective Aug. 1, 2007.

Pam Perri Weaver, executive vice president for the Builders Association of Minnesota, told a House committee that Minnesota has nearly 13,000 licensed contractors. Over the course of the last five years, the content of general liability insurance for builders has deteriorated and the new law clearly defines what coverage builders should have.

[HF1364/SF1168*/CH9](#)

— P. OSTBERG

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Break for small cities

More small cities could be in the position to bring in small businesses, if a bill, sponsored by [Rep. Andy Welti](#) (DFL-Plainview), is approved.

[HF406](#) would expand the small cities definition under the Tax Increment Financing Act to include any city with a population under 5,000 whose border does not abut a city with a population of 10,000 or more. An additional 113 small cities could be eligible under this bill.

The bill was held over by the House Taxes Committee March 26 for possible inclusion

in its omnibus bill. A companion bill, [SF782](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ann Lynch](#) (DFL-Rochester), was laid over March 8 by the Senate Taxes Committee.

"I would ask that we at least make it fair," Welti said. "Give them the tools to bring in business."

Tax Increment Financing uses the additional property taxes paid as a result of development in the district to pay for part of the development costs.

Under current law, a city must be located at least 10 miles from a city with a population of 10,000 or more to qualify for TIF districts.

Welti said that this bill would create an even playing field for small cities.

Qualifying as a small city under the TIF act would allow the city to use economic development TIF districts for small commercial developments, like retail, office space and similar developments. Cities that don't qualify as small cities can use TIF districts only for industries like manufacturing, research and development and warehousing.

— S. HEGMAN

MILITARY

Consumer contract cancellations

House approval was given to a bill that would help military personnel and their families get out of consumer contracts without penalty when they are called to duty or their duty station changes.

The March 22 vote was 131-0 in support of [HF532](#), sponsored by [Rep. Ryan Winkler](#) (DFL-Golden Valley). It was received the same day by the Senate and referred to the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee. [Sen. Sharon L. Erickson Ropes](#) (DFL-Winona) is the Senate sponsor.

"This allows service members to focus on more important things, like taking care of their family and other business arrangements," Winkler said.

Under the bill, protection would be offered in areas that likely affect younger soldiers, such as being able to cancel a cell phone, satellite television, Internet service or membership travel contract without penalty. It also prohibits utilities from disconnecting service if a member of the household has been ordered into active duty.

It would be applicable to contracts executed by or on behalf of a person called to active duty or for a permanent change of duty station which would result in it being impractical for the person to enjoy the contract benefits.

"There is a 30-day window for the wireless telephone cancellation," Winkler said.

If you have Internet access, visit the Legislature's
Web page at: www.leg.mn

"There is not a 30-day window for the service contracts. It simply states the termination is effective upon notification."

This bill would also extend protections of the federal [Servicemembers Civil Relief Act](#), which provides relief from rent, mortgage interest rates, credit card interest rates and other costs that service members incur when they are called to activity duty, to any business wholly owned by the servicemember.

— M. COOK

Bonus for the officers

Commissioned officers in the National Guard could qualify for a reenlistment bonus, as well as a \$1,000 tuition reimbursement grant.

Sponsored by [Rep. Larry Hosch](#) (DFL-St. Joseph), and passed by the House 131-1 March 27, [HF1594](#) would expand the bonus program, currently only available to enlisted personnel, to the Guard's commissioned officers. The bill awaits action in the Senate, where Sen. Ann Lynch (DFL-Rochester) is the sponsor.

The bill would also establish annually 25 postsecondary education reimbursement grants, up to \$1,000 each. The grants would be available, on a competitive basis, to current National Guard members or a person who agrees to join. The money would be for reimbursement of postsecondary education expenses not covered by other awards that may be available to the member.

Hosch said the bill is a request from the Minnesota National Guard to help with its recruitment efforts, and the cost would be absorbed through the agency's budget.

— L. SCHUTZ

TRANSPORTATION

Financing plan leaves House

A bill that would increase the state's gas tax and potentially raise other taxes to help pay for transportation needs received House approval March 24 on an 83-46 vote.

Sponsored by [Rep. Bernie Lieder](#) (DFL-Crookston), [HF946](#) was rejected by the Senate, which passed its own version ([SF1986](#)) 42-24 one day earlier. A conference committee is expected to work out the differences. The Senate sponsor is Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing).

The bill calls for a 5 cent increase in the state's gas tax in each of the next two fiscal years, a potential sales tax increase of 0.5 percent, increased license tab fees, the removal of a vehicle registration fee cap and \$1 billion in bonding. It also establishes a funding

formula for the motor vehicle sales tax revenue now fully dedicated to transportation.

Minnesota's gas tax hasn't increased from 20 cents per gallon since 1988.

The Senate plan would increase the tax by 10 cents on July 1, 2007, and automatically increase it based on inflation in future years.

The higher tax, according to Lieder, would cost drivers \$5 more per month, assuming they drive 11,000 miles annually in a car that gets 20 miles per gallon.

Supporters said the money is needed to fund transit and transportation systems that are widely recognized to need more than \$2 billion in improvement.

Some Republican members said the debate was an effort in futility because [Gov. Tim Pawlenty](#) has indicated he will veto the bill.

"This is not a solution, in part, because of the gas tax increase," said [Rep. Paul Kohls](#) (R-Victoria). "Let's not send the governor a bill he's going to veto. What a waste of our time."

"If we're operating by a veto threat we don't even need to be here," Lieder countered.

It would take 90 votes to override a veto, and although four Republicans supported the bill, one of them, [Rep. Dennis Ozment](#) (R-Rosemount), said he supported this bill to move it forward, but wouldn't support an override attempt.

Among the unsuccessful amendments offered was one by [Rep. John Berns](#) (R-Wayzata) which would have required voter approval before a joint powers board could impose a sales tax increase in the Twin Cities metropolitan area for transportation. It failed 66-63.

Under the bill, only counties outside the metropolitan area could impose the tax, subject to voter approval.

Supporters, including [Rep. Ron Erhardt](#) (R-Edina), said members need to go back one year to the Twins stadium debate to see that taxes have been imposed without voter approval.

"Building a stadium is not a core government function, and it makes sense to let the people weigh in on something like that," added [Rep. Melissa Hortman](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park). "Building roads and funding our education system are core government functions. It's at the heart of what our job responsibility is."

— M. COOK

Policy provisions plowing ahead

Committee approval was given to a bill that would impose a number of transportation policy changes.

Among the issues addressed by [HF1351](#), sponsored by [Rep. Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls), are traffic regulations, vehicle

registration, [Department of Transportation](#) planning reports, towing authority, railway safety and truck size and weight restrictions.

Approved March 23 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill awaits actions by the House Finance Committee. It has no Senate companion.

"There is no General Fund money in this bill," Hornstein said.

One of the more controversial items is a requirement that MnDOT prepare two cost estimates for trunk highway projects: the cost to have department employees perform the work and costs if it is done by a contract recipient. A contract valued at \$250,000 or more could only be entered into if the contract costs are below those projected by the department, the quality would meet or exceed that produced by the department and the contract is in the public interest. Although the department is against this provision, supporters say this is an accountability measure.

"There are some things that we need to know about, and this is a step in the right direction," said [Rep. Bernie Lieder](#) (DFL-Crookston).

The department would also need to:

- develop a plan to reduce motor vehicle greenhouse gas emissions;
- annually report on major highway projects for that year and the following 15;
- perform a study of speed limits on local roads;
- review the state's long-term transportation needs, and identify the strategies to meet those needs; and
- perform towing duties in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, under certain circumstances.

For Minnesotans that rely on transit assistance, the bill would require that paratransit services that receive state assistance allow trip scheduling up to four days in advance, guarantee same-day trips of 25 miles or less, and provide service at least 14 hours a day, unless that threshold is already met by one or more other providers.

— M. COOK

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Ag's new possibilities

Omnibus proposal is more than corn, beans and cows

By **LEE ANN SCHUTZ**

Agriculture in Minnesota is no longer just about corn, beans and cows on the "Back 40." It's also about putting Minnesota on the fast track to greater use of its resources for next generation fuels, and making the Minnesota Grown logo more recognizable and products more available.

The omnibus proposal put forward by the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division reflects the change, according to the sponsor of [HF2227, Rep. Al Juhnke](#) (DFL-Willmar).

The bill takes a comprehensive look at agriculture that will "get people really interested and involved in the future of agriculture in the state," said [Rep. Brad Finstad](#) (R-Comfrey).

The proposal to spend \$134.5 million during the 2008-09 biennium is a combination of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's initiatives and proposals brought forward by the division, the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Committee and its Veterans Affairs Division. Passed by the finance division March 28, the bill was referred to the House Finance Committee. The companion bill, [SF1925](#), sponsored by [Sen. Jim Vickerman](#) (DFL-Tracy), passed the Senate 66-0 March 22, but was tabled.

Called a bipartisan effort, Juhnke urged committee members to stay in support of the bill as attempts are made along the way to amend the bill, possibly dooming it to failure. And if the ag portion of the bill goes down, more than \$14.4 million in 2008 and another \$13.7 million in 2009 in veterans programming would go with it, he said.

There is little difference between the governor and the House on funding veterans programs over the 2008-09 biennium. And there is nearly agreement with the amount budgeted for the Department of Agriculture — the House at \$91 million and the governor at approximately \$94 million. There is, however, a difference of opinion as to how those funds should be spent.

New fuels, next move

A cornerstone to the governor's energy proposal this session is the NextGen BioEnergy Initiative, which has several components and is addressed in both the omnibus agriculture and energy finance bills.

The ag bill ups the governor's proposal to have 20 percent of the energy consumed in the state be derived from renewable resources by 2020 to 25 percent by 2025.

Through the department, the governor seeks \$10 million for grants to projects that would replace energy from fossil fuels with energy from renewable biomass. The House cuts that funding to \$4.4 million and broadens the scope to cellulosic bioenergy and biofuel projects, as well as grants to nongovernmental organizations to develop structures that promote local ownership of these plants.

By cutting the appropriation, Juhnke said money would be freed up for other ag-related projects.

Funds to be appropriated in the second year of the biennium would be awarded by a new NextGen Energy Board, which would be created in the first year of the biennium. The board would also research and report to the commissioner of agriculture and the Legislature on how the state can invest its resources to achieve energy independence. The board would be charged with developing grant programs to assist locally owned facilities move the state toward energy independence through the production of bioenergy.

The bill would award \$200,000 to several projects for design and feasibility work in 2008. Juhnke said these projects could serve as models for other projects that may be of interest to the new board. The bill also calls for a new Bioenergy Advisory Committee to represent various rural economic viewpoints to the new NextGen board.

Ethanol is still gold

The greatest share of the proposed Department of Agriculture budget is a \$30 million allocation for ethanol producer payments.

Ten ethanol plants in Minnesota are now eligible to receive producer payments, a program initiated in 1986 to get the budding industry off the ground. Each plant enrolled in the payment program is eligible for payment based on gallons of ethanol produced up to a maximum amount of \$3 million for each of the 10 years they can participate in the program.

Minnesota Grown

Called one of the most successful agricultural marketing programs at the department by the governor, the Minnesota Grown logo is drawing attention to the products grown in Minnesota. The bill hopes to increase awareness of products not only grown but "processed or manufactured" in the state, along with increasing participation in the program. It would raise the fee from \$5 to \$20 for anyone wanting to obtain a license to use the label and it would expand the use of the Minnesota Grown account to include revenue from fees and the development and sale of promotional materials, gifts and other appropriations. In supporting the measure, division members said that the label should be promoted in other states.

Other provisions in the bill include:

- establishment of a 12-member Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Council;
- a 40-cent check-off fee that would be charged by any person selling fertilizer to state producers, only if the board asks for it and it is approved by the Legislature;
- establishment of a food safety and defense task force to advise the governor and Legislature on food issues and food safety;
- deletion of existing rules and authorization for the Board of Animal Health to create new rules for control of bovine tuberculosis;
- an extension on the sunset for the moratorium on new open air swine basins; and
- designation of family agriculture revitalization zones. 

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Helping the littlest learners

Early childhood bill calls for some increased program funding

By **STEPHEN HARDING**

When the omnibus early childhood learning finance bill was released, there was some disappointment at the level of funding it received.

However, the chairwoman of the House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division was pleased that the bill would address goals that the division set forth at the beginning of the session.

“We wanted to accomplish four goals: move to close the achievement gap, highlight citizen engagement, provide more child care experiences and increase innovative efforts,” [Rep. Nora Slawik](#) (DFL-Maplewood) said.

But others were less than pleased.

“You were given a dollar to fix a \$100 problem,” said Chad Dunkley, president of the Minnesota Child Care Association. A 1 percent rate increase is a little hard to swallow, he said.

[Rep. Pat Garofalo](#) (R-Farmington) questioned the value placed on this area by the

House DFL caucus. “I don’t understand how members of the opposite party can identify early childhood as a top priority, when the fact of the matter is out of the \$800 million in (proposed) tax increases not one nickel came to this committee.”

Sponsored by Slawik, [HF1056](#) was approved March 26 by the House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division and March 28 by the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Finance Division. It awaits action by the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, [SF839](#), sponsored by [Sen. Tarryl Clark](#) (DFL-St. Cloud), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

In the House plan, early childhood would receive a \$64 million bump: \$34 million to the base and \$30 million in one-time funding.

The bill, however, will be split in two, according to Slawik.

Half will be tacked onto the omnibus health care and human services finance bill, while the

other half will be added to the omnibus K-12 education finance bill.

Child care provisions

Daycare and early child care education providers could see relief from high licensing fees that have created hardships for some providers, and receive extra training.

The bill would limit county fees to \$50 a year. Background checks for licensed home day care providers, which were \$100 and had to be paid by providers, would be paid by the state.

Unlicensed child care providers receiving child care assistance funding would receive a one-time home visit by the state to receive information on health, safety and school readiness.

Most Minnesota families, at some point, use a family member, friend or neighbor to watch their children while at work. A one-time \$1.5 million grant for the family, friend and neighbor grant program would provide training, support and resources to caregivers to promote children’s early literacy, healthy development and school readiness.

A two-hour voluntary professional training system with incentives and support for new child care practitioners would also be provided.

The bill would also add people found guilty of wrongfully obtaining public assistance to the list of those that cannot be authorized to be a legal non-licensed childcare provider. In current law, people who have committed certain felonies or misdemeanors within the past seven years are ineligible to be a legal child care provider.

Education preparedness

Slawik believes the most prominent part of the bill is the restoration of funding for Head Start and school readiness programs that should help close the achievement gap.

Head Start funding would be restored to the pre-2003 level, before cuts were made when the state was buried under a \$4.5 billion deficit.

Head Start would receive \$40.2 million over the biennium. With the funding increase it would be able to provide full-day services in their own program or in cooperation with licensed full-day child care programs.

Early Ed continued on page 23



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rayyan Z. Abdur Razzaq, 2, who came to the “Plant the Seeds - Help Children Bloom” rally with the St. Paul Rondo ECFE program, smells one of the paper flowers that decorated the Rotunda March 29. Early learning advocates, parents and child care providers came to the Capitol to encourage support for early childhood programs.

Energy's next generation

Renewable power gets a boost in energy finance bill

By Nick Busse

When Gov. Tim Pawlenty called for “comprehensive historic renewable energy legislation” in his State of the State address, he also encouraged legislators to “add your own good ideas.”

Members of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division, led by division chairman [Rep. Bill Hilty](#) (DFL-Finlayson), are taking him at his word.

[HF1392](#), sponsored by Hilty, is the division's omnibus energy finance bill. It would provide for a host of new investments in renewable and alternative energy sources like wind, solar, hydrogen and biofuels. The bill accounts for a sizeable chunk of Pawlenty's “Next Generation Energy Initiative” — albeit with some key differences from the governor's proposals.

Hilty said the differences are mostly noncontroversial, however.

“I think we've been pretty consistent with the goals that the governor's had. ... I don't see that there's anything that's highly controversial or objectionable in any of it,” he said.

Those goals include expanding the number of gas stations in the state that sell E85 and funding competitive grant programs for research into renewable energy. Hilty and the division have added a few of their own ideas, including new investments in hydrogen power and rural wind energy.

The overall price tag is different as well: Hilty's bill would have a net impact of approximately \$67.9 million on the General Fund over the next two fiscal years — \$33,000 less than House DFL leaders' spending target, but nearly \$8 million more than the governor's proposal.

[Rep. Torrey Westrom](#) (R-Elbow Lake), the division's top Republican, called the bill “generally, fairly good.” He and other Republicans have taken issue with language in the bill relating to mortgage originator license fees (the bill contains a number of provisions relating to the Department of Commerce that are unrelated to energy) and certain other

provisions, but for the most part, he said he's satisfied with the outcome.

Diverse technologies

The bill encompasses a wide array of renewable energy technologies and programs, from solar to hydroelectric and just about everything in between.

“There's research and development in every area. We're not trying to pick winners and losers,” Hilty said.

The “E85 Everywhere” initiative, which aims to expand the number of ethanol fueling stations in the state by way of a cost-sharing grant program, would get \$8 million — \$4 million less than the governor's recommendation. Hilty said federal actions may soon allow gas stations in Minnesota

to sell E20, which would also help increase ethanol use in the state.

Hydrogen power, considered one of the cleanest renewable energy technologies, would get a significant boost from the bill in the form of a \$10 million competitive grant program. The Department of Commerce would be directed to create a vision, goals, timeline and strategies for deploying hydrogen power in Minnesota, and then implement the program accordingly.

Wind power, key to meeting the state's newly adopted renewable energy standard, would get a helping hand in the form of a \$2 million rural wind energy development assistance program and also a \$3.25 million revolving loan program.

Research initiatives also figure prominently in the bill. Xcel Energy would be directed to transfer \$5 million to the Department of Commerce to fund a competitive grant program for renewable energy research projects. Xcel would also have to transfer an additional \$5 million to the department for a number of other programs, including a \$1 million “technical analysis and demonstration” project focusing on plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

Also included in the bill is a \$3 million grant in fiscal year 2009 to the University of Minnesota's Initiative for Renewable Energy and the Environment for various renewable energy research projects. Another \$10 million would be appropriated during fiscal years 2010 and 2011.

Other highlights of the bill include:

- a program that would give cash bonuses to state employees who make energy-efficiency suggestions that save the state money;
- \$4 million for preliminary engineering, permitting and development of a steam plant in St. Paul;
- \$500,000 in rebates for solar electricity projects; and
- \$60,000 for a feasibility study on hydroelectric generation at the Rapidan Dam in Blue Earth County.

The division approved the bill March 28 and sent it to the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, [SF1282](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), was laid over March 13 by the Senate Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Budget Division.



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

E85 pumps could become a more common sight in the state under the provisions of the omnibus energy finance bill.



Delivering on property tax reform

Ideas showcased to help wallets of Minnesotans

PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

One of the ideas spawned from the property taxpayer hot line, would be reinstatement of the “this old house” program. Under the provision, homeowners, like the owner of this historic St. Paul home, could exclude for 10 years the increase in value due to a new improvement made to a home at least 50 years old.

By SONJA HEGMAN

Rep. Paul Marquart is on a mission to provide significant property tax relief to every corner of the state.

The DFL legislator from Dilworth presented his plan to the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division March 26. As chairman of the division, Marquart has repeatedly made it known that property tax relief is something that must happen this year. After \$2.3 billion in property tax increases since 2001, Marquart is delivering on his pledge.

The report, [HF3](#), would provide \$543 million in property tax relief over the next two bienniums — \$443 million in 2008-09 and about \$100 million in 2010-11.

“We actually do provide real cuts,” Marquart said.

Without state aid relief, property taxes, according to the February forecast, are expected to increase 8.8 percent. Marquart’s plan would reduce taxes by 3.4 percent. The amount a homeowner pays would be based on their income.

“We wanted to provide relief to those who

needed it most and that’s our seniors, our families and our farmers,” Marquart said.

The cuts would be offset by a fourth tier income tax, affecting the state’s wealthiest taxpayers.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has said he will veto any income tax increases.

Ability to pay

The report, which now moves to the House Taxes Committee, is based largely on a homeowner’s ability to pay, which Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington) said will be the core of the omnibus tax bill.

“We have a very regressive property tax in this state,” Lenczewski said during a March 26 press conference. “This will provide relief to homeowners.”

Marquart’s division report will be rolled into that bill, but changes could still be made in the taxes committee or during expected conference committee meetings with the Senate.

Many bills the property tax division heard this year dealt with expanding the property

tax refund. To answer that, a new homestead credit state refund would replace two current programs. It would phase out the homestead market value credit and repeal the property tax refund. According to the nonpartisan House Research Department, the new homestead property tax refund would have two parts:

- A refund equal to a percentage of the homeowner’s property taxes that exceeds 2 percent of household income. The refund or credit rates range from 90 percent for very low-income filers to 25 percent for upper income filers, up to \$150,000. The maximum credit would be \$2,500. The existing property tax refund has a maximum income limit of \$92,980 and a maximum refund of \$1,740.
- A minimum refund would be guaranteed for a three-year period from 2008-2010 based solely on the homestead market value credit. This guarantee would be provided directly on the property tax statement. The homestead property tax refund must be applied for because it is based on income

and equals 100 percent of the market value credit for pay in 2008; 60 percent for pay in 2009; and 30 percent for pay in 2010. Beginning in 2011, no minimum guarantee unrelated to income would be provided.

The bill would also increase the maximum renter property tax refund by about 6 percent, from \$1,430 to \$1,500. The maximum eligible income would increase from \$50,160 to \$60,000.

[Rep. Morrie Lanning](#) (R-Moorhead) successfully amended the bill extending the limited market credit for two more years. The vote was 6-5. While he said the bill was put together to reflect things fairly, he's still uncomfortable with taxpayers filling out a form for the new refund.

"It's not good tax policy," he said. "I'm still going to work on a way to include that on the income tax form."

Citizens have a say

Part of the division report was based on a Citizens Omnibus Property Tax Bill that was compiled from e-mails and phone calls to a property tax hot line for two months starting at the end of January. Marquart sponsors [HF2142](#) with the idea of "bringing ideas from the kitchen table to the committee table."

One of those ideas would allow homeowners to pay their property taxes in eight equal installments from May 15 to Dec. 15, rather than in just two payments under the current system. It would also require homeowners desiring this option to apply to the county by April 15 of the year the taxes must be paid. Though this ties in with a person's ability to pay, some county groups do not like idea.

Keith Carlson, executive director of the Minnesota Inter-County Association, said he is concerned about this option because it will affect the cash-flow of every local government.

"I support the bill's focus on homeowners," he said during the division's markup of the report March 28. "But there is nothing stopping homeowners from (paying monthly) now. It's simply a non-issue."

Other provisions of the property tax section would include:

- expanding eligibility for the senior citizen property tax deferral program;

- establishing a seasonal recreational property tax deferral program;
- reinstituting the "this old house" program, which would exclude for 10 years the increase in value due to a new improvement made to a home at least 50 years old;
- requiring the commissioner of revenue, in consultation with county officials, to improve public awareness and participation in property tax relief programs;
- requiring cities with a population of more than 2,500 and counties to prepare and send a supplemental proposed property tax notice under certain circumstances; and
- requiring studies of the costs of the truth in taxation program and the level of taxpayer participation at the hearings and of the fiscal disparities program

Local option sales tax

The bill "shuts and bolts the door" on any future local option sales taxes, according to Marquart.

Under the bill, local governments may impose a general sales tax if permitted by a special law enacted before Jan. 1, 2008. It prohibits a local government from seeking authority for a local sales tax after Jan. 1, 2008, or from spending any of its own revenues to advertise, promote or hold an election for a referendum to support imposing a local sales tax.

Currently, 14 cities in Greater Minnesota and two counties have local option sales taxes, according to the nonpartisan House Research Department. But Lenczewski, who opposes local option sales taxes, said 44 cities should be added to that because all of Hennepin County has a local sales tax "imposed by the Legislature to pay for a stadium."

"It exacerbates disparities between cities," Lenczewski said. "Large cities would be huge winners. We either need to get rid of (local option sales taxes) or give them to everyone."

She added that a local sales tax is a revenue source that will also cause deductions in local government aid appropriations. But before the door is locked forever, the bill would allow Duluth, Bemidji, Crookston and North Mankato to sneak in. Each city would use

the sales tax for specific projects within their city.

"We've got to lock the door sometime," Marquart said.

Local aid

Over the next two years, the bill would reduce school district property tax levies by \$133 million, and state aid to cities, counties and townships would increase by \$78 million. Though local governments would be able to hold down their property taxes, they could still increase their levies.

Right now, it is unclear whether the school levy portion of the report will stay in the taxes committee or move on separately to an education committee, Marquart said.

The local government aid portion of the report would increase by \$60 million in 2008. Modifications to the program would:

- increase the city aid base portion of LGA for Newport, Taylors Falls, Rockville and Browns Valley;
- provide a \$3 per capita LGA payment to towns beginning with aids payable in 2008;
- increase the appropriation for county program aid by \$15 million for aids payable in 2008, an increase of approximately 7.5 percent over current law;
- provide for an inflation adjustment for city LGA and county program aid appropriations. The size of the adjustment depends on city organizations developing a consensus on the LGA formula in the future; and
- provide that aid formulas reflect changes in property tax bases caused by utility property valuations and the casino in Mahanomen in a timely fashion.

Louis Jambois, speaking on behalf of the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities, said he liked the comprehensive nature of the bill, but had concerns about LGA. He said the LGA portion doesn't recognize the need for additional resources in the outer-ring metro area.

"(Having) winners and losers will result in angst and conflict," he said. "It doesn't mean we don't support growth, but there will be a problem reaching a consensus." 

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Stiffer penalties and victim support

Public safety finance bill proposes \$1.89 billion in spending

By CRAIG GREEN

With language from 71 different bills, the omnibus public safety finance bill covers several areas: appropriations; general crime; DWI and driving related provisions; crime victims; courts and public defenders; corrections; public safety and law enforcement; and emergency communications.

Sponsored by [Rep. Michael Paymar](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF829](#) was approved March 29 by the House Public Safety Finance Division and sent to the House Finance Committee.

The Senate version, [SF1992](#), sponsored by [Sen. Linda Higgins](#) (DFL-Mpls), was passed 64-0 by the Senate March 23 before being tabled.

Where the money might go

For the upcoming biennium, [Gov. Tim Pawlenty](#) has recommended a public safety budget of nearly \$1.88 billion, a 9 percent increase from the 2006-07 biennium. This also represents a \$142.6 million increase, or 8.3 percent, above the 2008-09 base budget.

With input from the House Public Safety Finance Division and the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee, the bill proposes spending \$1.89 billion from the General Fund, which is more than \$12 million above the governor's recommendation. Some of the specifics include:

- \$12.5 million to the Office of Justice Programs for crime victim services, law enforcement emergency funds, auto-theft impound fee reimbursements and youth intervention programs;
- \$4.5 million to the District Courts for mandated services, six new judgeships and 12 new drug courts;
- \$3.1 million to the Public Defense Board that may be used for staffing, administration and transcript costs; and

- \$2 million to the Department of Corrections for offender re-entry programs and mentoring grants for incarcerated parents.

A number of bills focusing on crime and technology are in the omnibus bill.

[Rep. Debra Hilstrom](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Center) sponsors [HF503](#), which would make using the Internet to solicit sex from a child a felony. According to Assistant Attorney General David Voigt, half the teenagers on the Internet communicate with someone they have not met. "This bill is about protecting children in the Internet age," Voigt said. "Sexual predators have unprecedented access to children, and unfortunately, an unprecedented opportunity to anonymity in communicating with children."

[HF2205](#), sponsored by [Rep. Karla Bigham](#) (DFL-Cottage Grove) would allow courts to give repeat sex offenders a life sentence, even if there is only one previous sex offense conviction. Current statute requires two or more convictions.

Another bill, [HF2265](#), would require anyone released on supervised release or parole with a violent crime conviction to submit to an on-demand search by a probation or peace officer. When this was presented, [Rep.](#)

[Jeremy Kalin](#) (DFL-Lindstrom) asked the bill's sponsor, [Rep. Joe Mullery](#) (DFL-Mpls), if there is a danger of going too far by giving law enforcement this much authority.

Mullery said that it's time to do what's needed to stop crime. "I don't think we're going too far. It's the criminals that are going too far."

Crime victims

[HF1841](#), sponsored by [Rep. Steve Simon](#) (DFL-St. Louis Park), would allow victims of domestic violence to terminate a residential lease, provided they pay one additional month's rent after the tenant vacates the residence.

In testimony before the House Crime Victims Subcommittee March 16, witnesses shared their experiences as victims of abuse.

Loreline Arevalos said that after she was beaten by her ex-boyfriend so badly that her eyes were swollen shut, she told her landlord that she wanted to break the lease on her apartment so that she could move somewhere safer. Her landlord, understanding of her situation, told Arevalos that she would still be responsible for the remaining rent on the lease.

Melinda Hugdahl, a family law attorney with the Legal Services Advocacy Project in St. Paul, said that domestic abuse victims in these situations usually have few options. "Leave the premises and face a judgment for unpaid rent, or remain on the premises in a dangerous, often life-threatening environment," Hugdahl said.

Younger criminals

At the March 22 meeting of the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee, [Rep. Torrey Westrom](#) (R-Elbow Lake) spoke about 2-year-old Emily Johnson who was killed by a young man who was 13 years, 11 months and one week. He was just days shy of being eligible to be charged as an adult.

For anyone to say the young man didn't know what he was doing is hard to argue and hard to believe, especially as we see more juvenile crime occurring, Westrom said.

He then offered an amendment that would lower the age a juvenile could be charged as an adult from 14 to 13. Although Mullery, chairman of the committee, was in full support, he was concerned that adding any amendments would stall the bill. Mullery said that he had spoken with [Sen. Mee Moua](#) (DFL-St. Paul), chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and they both agreed to work on this issue over the summer.

Westrom then withdrew the amendment.



"I don't think we're going too far. It's the criminals that are going too far."

— Rep. Joe Mullery

Friday, March 23

HF2319-Welti (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Prostate cancer screening program established.

HF2320-Peterson, A. (DFL)

Finance

Pollution Control Agency funding provided to fully characterize emissions from biomass gasification facilities.

HF2321-Peterson, A. (DFL)

Finance

Biomass gasification facilities air emissions assessment study authorized.

HF2322-Atkins (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Minnesota Milestones utilization enhancement provided and report required.

HF2323-Mullery (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Minnesota State Retirement System correctional state employees retirement plan actuarial cost estimate of including sentence-to-service crew leaders provided.

HF2324-Winkler (DFL)

Housing Policy & Finance & Public Health Finance Division

Housing with services establishment conditions modified.

HF2325-Winkler (DFL)

Public Safety & Civil Justice

DWI offenders; ignition interlocks use provided.

HF2326-Hornstein (DFL)

Transportation Finance Division

Failure to yield right-of-way to buses on highway shoulders enforcement and penalties provided.

HF2327-Haws (DFL)

Finance

Business incubator for startup science-based companies funding provided.

HF2328-Haws (DFL)

Finance

Regional inter-local service sharing grants provided relating to delivery of public safety services.

HF2329-Howes (R)

Taxes

Homestead local option disaster abatement provisions modified.

HF2330-Juhnke (DFL)

Environment & Natural Resources

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts Ice Fishing Weekend license exemption provided.

HF2331-Clark (DFL)

Housing Policy & Finance & Public Health Finance Division

Eviction records maintained by courts and tenant screening services deletion and expungement provided.

HF2332-Kalin (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Human services permanent bar to set aside a disqualification modified.

HF2333-Ward (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Public Employees Retirement Association police and fire plan disabled members authorized to elect to change the laws under which benefits are determined.

HF2334-Ward (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Rule adoption petitions requirements modified.

HF2335-Erickson (R)

Taxes

Princeton public facilities construction materials sales tax exemption provided.

HF2336-Welti (DFL)

Finance

Board of Electricity fund transfer repealed.

HF2337-Welti (DFL)

E-12 Education

Earth and space, life and physical sciences assessment in grades 10 through 12 provided.

HF2338-Gunther (R)

Finance

Entrepreneurial and small business assistance grants provided.

HF2339-Berns (R)

Environment & Natural Resources

National Guard and reserve members who have served outside the United States provided free angling and hunting licenses.

HF2340-Berns (R)

Taxes

School district leased property exempted from taxation under certain circumstances.

HF2341-Thissen (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

St. Paul Teachers Retirement Fund Association and Special School District No. 625, St. Paul, contribution and aid payments modified, and new amortization target date provided.

HF2342-Buesgens (R)

E-12 Education

Medical technology charter schools authorized.

HF2343-Abeler (R)

Public Safety & Civil Justice

Medical liability actions regulated, and inadmissibility of certain health care provider statements and conduct provided.

HF2344-Brod (R)

Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs

Unfunded local mandates prohibited and local mandate review board established.

HF2345-Peppin (R)

E-12 Education

Parent Choice in Education act adopted.

HF2346-Thissen (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Retirement bounce-back annuity authorized when provided for by a marriage dissolution decree.

Saturday, March 24

HF2347-Dill (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Public Employees Retirement Association disability benefits payment required.

HF2348-Erhardt (R)

Taxes

Seasonal-recreational property tax refund provided.

HF2349-Faust (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Liquor sales; "person of questionable character" defined as any person whose driver's license restricts the person from consuming any alcohol at any time.

HF2350-Brod (R)

Health & Human Services

Certain vaccines containing mercury prohibited and providers required to notify patients when a vaccine contains more than a trace of mercury.

HF2351-Johnson (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Cable communications systems regulation modified and state-authorized video providers regulated.

HF2352-Demmer (R)

Finance

Science teacher grants provided for additional laboratory time.

HF2353-Hortman (DFL)

Transportation Finance Division

Congestion Reduction Task Force established, Urban Partnership agreement application required and participation authorized.

HF2354-Fritz (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Tilt-A-Whirl designated as the State Amusement Ride.

HF2355-Erickson (R)

E-12 Education

Health and safety revenue for school districts use criteria specified.

Monday, March 26

HF2356-Clark (DFL)

Finance

HOME Line tenant hot line services program funding provided.

HF2357-Rukavina (DFL)

Finance

Virginia industrial park development funding provided.

HF2358-Olson (R)

Taxes

Shared city township levies under orderly annexation agreements exempted from levy limits.

HF2359-Olson (R)

Taxes

Capital gain income tax exclusion authorized.

HF2360-Lenczewski (DFL)

Taxes

Tax volatility reduction account established, and adjustments in the account made based on forecasts of state revenue gains and losses.

HF2361-Murphy, M. (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Public pension fund financial reporting requirements modified.

HF2362-Lenczewski (DFL)

Taxes

Sales and use tax study required.

HF2363-Murphy, M. (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Minnesota State Retirement System correctional state employees' retirement; Human Services employees authorized to make back equivalent member contributions and transfer pension service credit.

HF2364-Dettmer (R)
Commerce & Labor
Horse racing licenses revoked unless live racing is conducted.

HF2365-Holberg (R)
Taxes
Sales tax rebate provided.

Tuesday, March 27

HF2366-Clark (DFL)
Finance
Monticello; radiation emissions report required.

HF2367-Dean (R)
E-12 Education
Charter school students authorized to participate in extracurricular activities in their resident school district.

HF2368-Doty (DFL)
Finance
Garrison wastewater treatment facility funding provided.

HF2369-Tillberry (DFL)
E-12 Education
School districts required to provide notice when counseling services are being performed by non-licensed personnel.

HF2370-Greiling (DFL)
E-12 Education
Joint legislative committee established to study merging the Office of Higher Education into the Department of Education and appointments provided.

HF2371-Bigham (DFL)
Finance
Trunk Highway 10/61 corridor; Cottage Grove corridor vista enhancement project funding provided.

HF2372-Eken (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Trailer and tractor semiannual registration established.

HF2373-Fritz (DFL)
Finance
Job Skills Partnership Board funding provided to provide training for bar and restaurant employees to transition to other employment.

HF2374-Simon (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Public pension plan data classification provisions modified.

HF2375-Peterson, N. (R)
Commerce & Labor
Legal recognition of electronic records and signatures required relating to insurance.

HF2376-Hornstein (DFL)
Finance
Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles and neighborhood electric vehicles projects funding provided.

Thursday, March 29

HF2377-Garofalo (R)
Commerce & Labor
Prevailing wage provisions modified.

HF2378-Sviggun (R)
Health & Human Services
No constitutional right to abortion established and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF2379-Sviggun (R)
Health & Human Services
State funds prohibited for abortion services unless expressly authorized by the Legislature, and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF2380-Sviggun (R)
Commerce & Labor
State department and local government construction contracts regulated.

HF2381-Davnie (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Workers' compensation, retraining and fee provisions modified; advisory commission established; and report and rulemaking required.

HF2382-Erickson (R)
Commerce & Labor
State lottery video terminals authorized, revenue uses provided, lawful gambling taxes modified and technical corrections provided.

HF2383-Erickson (R)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
Isle local sales tax authorized.

HF2384-Hornstein (DFL)
Finance
Solar Energy Advancement Act of 2007 adopted establishing a rebate program for installation of solar technologies funded by a surcharge on retail electricity bills.

HF2385-Solberg (DFL)
Higher Education & Work Force Development Policy & Finance Division
Wood products manufacturing plants required to be maintained for a period of time after closing.

HF2386-Olin (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Oakland Park Nursing Home pension benefits provided upon privatization.

HF2387-Haws (DFL)
Higher Education & Work Force Development Policy & Finance Division
Higher education students required to sign a written waiver if they choose not to be vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

HF2388-Cornish (R)
Environment & Natural Resources
Ginseng designation report required.

HF2389-Atkins (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Good faith insurance practices required relating to claims and report required.

HF2390-Olson (R)
Transportation Finance Division
Freeway shoulders use authorized for transit and metro mobility buses, and limited use of bus stops permitted for motor vehicle passenger carriers.

HF2391-Hornstein (DFL)
Finance
Metropolitan area transit and paratransit capital expenditures additional financing provided.

HF2392-Atkins (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Minnesota Securities Act modified.

HF2393-Hamilton (R)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Lakefield Nursing Home pension benefits provided upon privatization.

HF2394-Lesch (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act provided.

HF2395-Davnie (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Teachers Retirement Association Minneapolis teacher retirement annuity increase provided to correct an erroneous benefit estimate.

HF2396-Rukavina (DFL)
Finance
White road and trail project funding provided.

HF2397-Rukavina (DFL)
Finance
Aurora wastewater treatment facility funding provided.

HF2398-Rukavina (DFL)
Finance
Iron Junction water and sewer extensions funding provided.

Early Ed continued from page 17

Neighborhood Circulators could receive grants up to \$175,000 for the biennium to provide two buses in St. Paul. One bus now operates on the city's West side to link students to libraries, parks and recreational centers after school and on Saturdays.

Early childhood community hubs would receive \$2 million in one-time money for the biennium to coordinate and improve families' access to community early childhood care and education, schools, health services and help with developmental needs. One hub would be located in a rural district, one in the suburbs and one in an urban area. "The hubs idea is really innovative," Slawik said.

The governor's proposed scholarship demonstration project has been pared down from \$28.9 million to \$2.5 million in one-time money during the biennium, and only two pilot programs would be created. Parents or guardians of a 4-year-old child with household incomes less than or equal to 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines would be eligible to receive a \$4,000 scholarship.

The hope with the scholarship program is to create competition between the various day care providers to provide better and more comprehensive early education experiences. 

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MINNESOTA INDEX

Blood donation

Approximate number of times a heart beats daily	100,000
Percent of population eligible to donate blood	60
Percent that donates.....	5
Lives that can be saved with one pint of blood.....	3
Estimated pints of blood in a man	12
In a woman	10
Units of blood that need to be collected each month by the	
Mid-America Division Blood Services, which serves 250 hospitals in	
10 states, to meet patient need	54,000
Approximate number of volunteer blood donors in the division	800,000
Approximate number of blood drive coordinators	6,200
Minimum number of days for a person between blood donations	55
Estimated total time, in minutes, it takes to give blood, including registration and	
refreshments	45-60
Times per 12-month period a person can donate plasma.....	13
Number of Red Cross chapters in Minnesota.....	22
Number of Red Cross volunteers in Minnesota for fiscal year ending June 30, 2006.....	15,648
Number of registered disaster volunteers	1,271
Number of Minnesota disaster responses.....	802
Number of families assisted in disasters	983
Minnesotans enrolled in a Red Cross health and safety class	286,608
Number of Minnesota case services provided for military personnel and families.....	3,266
Minimum age to donate blood in Minnesota.....	17
Minimum weight, in pounds.....	110
Hospitals served by the North Central Region of American Red Cross Blood Services,	
which serves Minnesota, western Wisconsin and eastern South Dakota.....	109
Volunteer blood donors.....	127,000
Pints donated annually	240,000
Number of blood drives.....	5,000
Approximate number of Americans who receive a blood transfusion	
each year, in millions.....	5
Number of seconds on average that someone in America needs blood	2
Percent of U.S. population that is O+ blood type	38
Percent that is A+ blood type	34
Percent that is B+ blood type	9

— M. COOK

Sources: Mid-America Division Blood Services; Twin Cities Area and Northland chapters of the American Red Cross; Memorial Blood Centers.

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