Bills & Regs

DISABILITIES Legislation of interest to physically handicapped people is heard by a number of different committees. The key discrimination bill, S49, was heard and held by Commerce & Labor on March 1. The Associated Industries of Mass. is fighting the bill as it did last year. Public Safety heard H647 on Feb. 27, a bill to make commercial buildings accesible to handicapped people. This is the major architectural barriers bill of 1978, according to activists. Two bills pertaining to the use of international symbols will be heard: H3774 before State Administration on building symbols (no date) and H4101 before Public Safety on automobile plates (today). On March 20, Human Services will hear S525 which would create an Office for the Handicapped within the executive branch and S447, "a Chapter 766 for people over 21" according to a spokesperson for Mass Rehab, which would provide vocational rehabilitation and training service for older handicapped people.

YOUTH Today is an important day for childrens legislation. Human Services will hear a number of bills including: S451 on day care sliding fee scales; H807 which requires the establishment of maximum security facilities for male and female juveniles; H2023, Rep. Phil Johnston's reorganization plan to establish a Department of Children's and Family Services; H1552 on children's right to counsel; and S446, a basic rights of children bill.

FOLLOWING LEGISLATION

Although the current crisis in the House over the MBM investigation threatens to hold up legislation this year the way the DiCarlo-MacKenzie trial held things up in the Senate last year, there may be a positive fallout. By forcing some of "the troops" to vote against him on the question of speeding up consideration of forming a "blue ribbon commission," Speaker Thomas McGee may have weakened his control over a number of heretofore loyalists. As Representative Barney Frank put it, "They voted against him on this one and they found they weren't struck by lightning."

The cowardly lion found there was nothing to be afraid of when he stood up to the Wizard of Oz. It could happen in Massachusetts.

The most important "kids bill" for the Department of Youth Services is S692, a refile that would mandate minimum sentencing of juveniles. The bill, filed by Sens Locke and Parker, has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee which has not set hearing dates as of press time.

The Education Committee has postponed its hearing on school breakfast program-related bills which was scheduled for today. Perhaps as early as March 20 the Committee will hear several local option bills and H1733, a bill that could possibly exempt some urban areas from mandatory participation in the program.

Utility Companies & Friends in High Places

The recent state appropriation of $1 million for emergency fuel needs contained a surprise that neither bill drafters nor supporters knew about until after the fact. Under the aegis of Senate President Kevin Harrington, the utility companies, represented by Boston Gas lobbyist J. Kinney O'Rourke, got themselves written in as eligible recipients of the fuel funds. This came as a surprise because the money was intended to help people who are forced to pay C.O.D. for fuel oil.

The change was made by slipping an innocuous-looking reference to a section of the General Laws (pertaining to utility company shutoff procedures) into the appropriations bill while in Senate Ways and Means. There was no mention of utility companies, per se. The ploy may be ultimately unsuccessful, according to an administration official, because the language in the regulations is sufficiently vague to allow Community Action Programs (CAPs), who will administer the funds, to set priorities excluding utilities.

In a related area, the federal Emergency Energy Assistance Program that went into effect last week contains another plum for utility companies. They cannot be required by CAPs (who also administer this program) to make concessions as a prerequisite to receiving funds, as was the case last year. Escrow accounts, which were widely used last year to aid elderly persons, are also prohibited.

WELFARE March 23 is the big Human Services hearing date for welfare bills, with proposed benefit legislation scheduled for the morning and administration matters for the afternoon. Some bills not mentioned in the last edition of the *Update* are S491 to establish a toll free welfare fraud telephone number; H804 to provide emergency home heating fuel for low income people; H1375 which would restore medical assistance to General Relief recipients; H1383, a different medical care and assistance restoration bill; H1788, another in the annual work requirement bills, and H2188, to set up a battered womens hotline.

On February 28, the Health Care Committee reported out favorably S383, which would mandate cost of living increases for welfare recipients and S384 which would restore the General Relief program. The committee has not as yet set a date for H176, the Welfare Department's bill to "improve" the administration of the Medicaid program.

The Administration has still not issued proposed regulations revising General Relief program eligibility. Welfare Commissioner Alexander Sharp informs us that he and Human Services' Jerald Stevens support the "scorecard" approach to defining non-employability, which another Department official says should be made public within a month. Welfare activists and Department sources point to the Governor's lack of commitment as the reason for the holdup.

OTHER Health Care reported H10 out favorably, a bill to require lead paint inspections of day care facilities... Commerce & Labor heard, but took no action on H3455, a bill to prohibit sexual harassment on the job... The taxation Committee is currently not planning to hold a hearing on H1666, a bill to extend the life of the controversial $500 tax credit for manufacturing and research & development companies... The Energy Committee has not set a firm hearing date for H1182, a bill to require EOCD to define criteria for dispensing weatherization funds... And the Taxation Committee has just set dates for two of Mass. Fair Share's tax bills, H912 requiring publication of the names of major tax delinquents (March 24) and H915, the so-called "circuit breaker" bill (April 3).

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Speaking of ...

Campaign 78, here are some first returns-who landed, or is negotiating with, who for management and consultant roles: FRANK HATCH is courting Bailey & Deardourff for media (Gerald Ford and N.Y. Rep. Bill Green); MICHAEL DUKAKIS has been talking to Mal MacDougall for TV (Ford); ELAINE NOBLE has Santa Fareri as manager and Rothstein & Buckley for advertising (Colo. Sen. Floyd Haskell); LEW CRAMPTON's manager is Suzzane Perney (Galvin Plan), with Ray Welch Assoc. on advertising (N.H. Sen. John Durkin); Lisa Zankman will manage PETER MEADE's campaign; and BARBARA ACKERMANN is sounding out Lou DiNatle (formerly with Kevin Harrington) ... Last week we reported that JIM BAILEY was unable to be the public member of the Capital Resource Company because he currently holds two gubernatorial appointments, the max according to the state Contitution. There is an exception: "Persons holding the office of President, Professor or Instructor of Harvard College!" ... According to Sen. JACK BACKMAN, as of March 2, 198 welfare fathers had been declared eligible for workfare, 36 of whom had already been assigned to work sites. On the legal front, welfare attorney STEVE GOLDSTEIN informs us that a preliminary injunction against WEP was granted on March 3, only to be lifted on the 7th when DES came back to court with emergency regs. On the 9th, Goldstein countered with a challenge to the emergency nature of the regs ... Handicapped activist MAUREEN WINN pointed out a rather obvious contradiction to a McDonald's fast food chain exec. It seems that owner RAY KROC contributes in a big way to multiple sclerosis research, but his stores do not provide easy access for people in wheelchairs. At least in Mass. that will no longer be the case ... Some names left out of our recent "who to get to know" stories: AMY SANDS, *WGBH*; MARGIE ARONS, *WGBH-TV*; MARILYN PRONOVOST, children and TOM ADAMS, rehabilitation, both of Sen. Human Services ... KEVIN HARRINGTON is thinking of running for re-election ... And with this issue, we begin our second year. Thanks for your help and support ....