Bills & Regs

(Ed. note: Due to a deadline conflict with the possibly imminent prorogation of the state legislature, final action may have been taken on all bills listed here by the time this issue of the Update is distributed. The editors feel it may be useful, nonetheless, to know where bills were just prior to prorogation.)

Welfare S599, the *Emergency Assistance* bill (*Update*, June 23) has been engrossed in the Senate and is now in House Ways and Means. Advocates fear that efforts to move House Ways and Means Chair John Finnegan before the legislature prorogues will be unsucessful.

New *Emergency Assistance procedures* under the existing restrictive program became effective July 1. Advocates are awaiting the "implementing memos" to see if there is any improvement over the current regulations.

Welfare recipients participating in the *Monthly Reporting Project* (formerly called Monthly Income Reporting—MIR, *Update*, April 14) can expect to receive notification with their July checks that the project will begin in September. The experiment, funded by a $2 million grant from HEW, will involve three community service areas: Roxbury Crossing, Adams Street, and Hancock Street. The plan incorporates a notification and appeals procedure protecting recipients during the first few months from automatic termination for failure to return the form within the allocated seven days. Advocates are concerned there will still be problems, especially with non-English speaking minorities.

Mental Health The Department of Mental Health is watching closely the following bills:

A *day care hospital* bill, H4319, would allow mental patients to visit a day treatment center, similar to an outpatient facility, and still be covered by third party payments at one-half rate. Currently only in-patient services are covered. Insurance companies are fighting the bill, which is now in House Ways and Means.

DMH is also hoping H6253, a *zoning* bill in House Ways and Means, will get through. The bill establishes quotas and physical distances between community residences in a neighborhood.

Sen. Jack Backman's *seclusion and restraint* bill (*Update*, May 27) was vetoed by Gov. King, who said DMH is developing similar policies, and was then overridden by the Senate, 31-0. The House sat on the bill up to *Update* deadline, leading one observer to think the House would let the veto stand by its inaction.

Advocates are mixed in their support for H6119, formerly S667, and S628, which are awaiting enactment by the House and sitting in Senate Ways and Means, respectively. Both would *allow psychologists to commit patients*. S667 would allow them to commit to Bridgewater; S628 would allow them to pink slip (commit under dangerous circumstances). The bills have been watered down from last year's, which would have allowed psychologists to commit under more circumstances.

Human Services Secretary Charles Mahoney has made a commitment to implement administratively the provisions of H3001, which *permits those under 21 to receive Medicaid payments in free-standing psychiatric hospitals*. Presently those under 21 must be in treatment in a psychiatric ward of a general hospital. The bill made it to House Ways and Means.

Corrections Gov. King's proposed *prison expansion* has been limited sharply by the FY81 Capital Outlay budget. As of press time, it contained only a $1 million fund for new beds and programs and nearly $16 million in renovations. Advocates would prefer to see the money for beds go to community-based facilities.

Disabilities A strengthened version of H650, a bill *against discrimination in employment*, has been accepted by the Office of Handicapped Affairs, several advocacy groups, and the Associated Industries of Massachusetts. Greater Boston Legal Services, however, has reservations about the redraft. The bill is in House Third Reading, where it may stay.

The *constitutional amendment prohibiting discrimination against handicapped persons*, S1910, was passed at a legislative constitutional convention. It will be on the ballot in November.

Governor King vetoed the outside budget section assuring *payments for personal care attendants*. Advocates have the votes to overturn it in the House and Senate, but House Speaker Thomas McGee won't call it to the floor. Advocates doubt the House counsel's ruling that the veto is illegal, since the circumstances parallel a court-upheld veto by Governor Dukakis. The Boston Center for Independent Living is trying to convince McGee to call the issue and save the section.

Transportation Governor King's top priority legislation, S2231, the *MBTA reorganization* bill, awaits action from Senate Ways and Means. The MBTA Advisory Board, representing cities and towns, CPPAX, the Mass. Taxpayers Foundation, the League of Women Voters, and Common Cause, have submitted alternative legislation which they hope will be offered as an amendment from the Senate floor. The key difference between the Governor's and the Advisory Board's bill is that the latter leaves the power structure of the MBTA intact, focussing on controlling spending and efficient allocation of funds. The Governor's bill would severely limit the role of the Advisory Board, restructuring and insulating decision making. The Advisory Board's bill is considered preferable for concentrating on keeping costs down and preserving a more responsive decision-making structure.

Youth S2072, the *Office for Children* strengthening bill (*Update*, June 9) has moved to Third Reading, but it looks as though it "may sit there".

H6243, the *DYS secure facilities for juveniles* bill (*Update*, June 9) is in Senate Ways and Means. In wake of the Mass. Advocacy Center report issued last week (Guest Column, this issue) Sen. Jack Backman has proposed substituting a comprehensive study for the bill's present language, which calls for a $10 million capital outlay for new secure facilities.

Other H6253, currently in House Ways and Means, would create a *Human Services Finance Authority*, with power to sell bonds to finance community residences and the like. Legislators are wary about giving up that budgeting right.

S579 raced to the Governor's desk recently, to the consternation of many. The bill *excludes from the public information about all complaints, investigations and disciplinary actions* taken by the Medical Board of Registry until final judgement. This part of the bill was overshadowed by another provision that would allow a person to testify without concern for libel charges. Corrective action will be filed—this year, if there's time.

The *omnibus housing* bill (*Update*, June 23), S2153, confronted resistance to the large sums involved in the three bond issues (*Update*, June 23) when it went to the House. Also under fire was the provision, disfavored by many housing authorities, to promote CDC development of low income family housing. Advocates stepped up efforts behind the bill.

Coming Attractions

Wednesday, July 9

Elderly Legal Coalition Meeting, a day long meeting at the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 356 Boylston Street, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. (Jim Bergman, 426-3401).

Thursday, July 10

Public Hearing on Abolition of Quarterly Flat Grant and New Emergency Assistance Regulations, conducted by the Coalition for Basic Human Needs, time and location to be determined (426-4363, or local CBHN chapter).

Saturday, July 12

Parent Co-ops and Other Child Care Options, a workshop sponsored by Concerned Citizens for Quality Child Care, donations, 2:30-5 p.m., YMCA, 401 Warren St., Roxbury (825-3630 or 427-5300).

Thursday, July 17

Food Stamp Advisory Committee Meeting, 600 Washington St., 10:30 a.m. (727-8588).

Assistance Payments Advisory Committee Meeting, 600 Washington St., 1 p.m. (727-8588).

July 18-20

National Conference on Alternative State and Local Policy, to be held in Pittsburgh, PA (Policy Training Center, 547-4473).

Saturday, July 19

Boston People's Organization, open meeting and neighborhood workshops on voter registration, state rep and anti-Prop. 2½ campaigns, and more. Harriet Tubman House, Boston, 12-5 p.m. (Barbara Treacy, 361-8136).

July 19-26

Avon Institute, a gathering focused on issues of the '80s sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee, Lake Winnipesaukee, NH (AFSC, 661-6130).

Tuesday, July 22

Implementation of Jobs Through Integration Program, discussed at general membership meeting of the Boston Jobs Coalition, 6 p.m., 10 West St., Boston (Tom or Yvonne, 426-7148 or 426-8302).

Wednesday, July 23

Main Street, a film and discussion about commercial revitalization and architectural heritage, sponsored by the National Trust, at Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 44 School St., 5th floor conference room, 12-1 p.m. (MAPC, 523-2454).

Thursday, July 24

U.S. Intervention in the Carribean and Central America, forum sponsored by Mobilization for Survival, 6:30 potluck, 7:30 meeting, 13 Sellars St., Cambridge (354-0008).

Saturday, July 26

Casa del Sol reception to honor artists who have assisted the cultural center, 2-6 p.m., 1 Paseo Boriken (536-8280).

The next *Update* will have listings from July 23 through August 6. Please submit listings by July 15.

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