

LEGISLATURE

Juvenile justice system focus of bill

■ Proposal suggests development of more non-secure detention centers.

By Veronica Daehn

Staff writer

A bill that Papillion Sen. Nancy Thompson said would help the juvenile justice system was held in the Health and Human Services Committee on Friday.

According to a 33-page amendment to LB1167, the bill would adopt the Nebraska County Juvenile Services Plan Act.

The purpose of the bill is to encourage counties to develop more non-secure detention centers and develop and expand the availability of the services those centers offer, the amend-

ment states.

The amendment defines non-secure detention as detention with no "restrictive hardware, construction and procedure."

Secure detention is defined as detention in a structured "hardware-secured facility designed to restrict a juvenile's movement."

"There is a lack of community programs," Thompson said. "Services to youth are fragmented, and efforts to divert youth are not good."

Thompson said the bill would create more alternatives for youth detention services within counties.

The amendment also states that each county would have to develop a county juvenile services plan by Jan. 1, 2003.

The plan would include input from local members of a juvenile justice advisory committee about the existing

risk factors for delinquency in the county.

The committee would also evaluate juvenile services available within and close to the county, the primary secure and non-secure detention facilities and a plan to enhance intervention services within the county.

A Juvenile Detention and Probation Services Team would also be created.

This team would include a mixture of county commissioners, probation officers, judges, county attorneys, state senators and Department of Health and Human Services representatives.

"We need to be fairer in what's happening to youth across the state," Thompson said. "This task force would sort through those issues."

The bill states that the Office of Probation Administration would prepare a risk assessment evaluation form

that would be used by probation officers and judges across the state to determine what type of detention a juvenile needs.

Thompson said the state needs to intervene early in juvenile crime.

"I think this is a reasonable place to start to get to the front end of the process," she said.

Ron Ross, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, spoke against the bill Friday.

Ross said the amendment assigned unnecessary costs to his department that it would not normally incur.

He said he was concerned with the "broad brush" definition of detention.

"Such a definition blurs the objective, and it would be problematic in implementation," Ross said. "We support continued improvements in the juvenile justice system, but the premise is flawed."

Outside smoking targeted

■ Proposed bill would keep smokers at least 10 feet from doors of public buildings.

By Veronica Daehn

Staff writer

Nebraska residents tired of walking through smoke every time they enter or exit a building could soon see some relief.

Papillion Sen. Nancy Thompson spoke to members of the Health and Human Services Committee on Friday about a bill that would outlaw smoking around the entrances to public buildings.

LB1033 is Thompson's attempt to alleviate more of the secondhand smoke that some non-smokers are subjected to in the workplace.

"This is a simple little bill," Thompson said. "But it does affect people."

With the passage of the Clean Air Act, smokers were pushed outside of public buildings.

Thompson said that's why there is so much smoke around building entrances now.

Non-smokers are frustrated, she said.

"(The frustration) is a combination of the public not being used to smoke and people not wanting to be in the fog," Thompson said.

The bill would keep smokers 10 feet away from public building entrances.

Sen. Marian Price of Lincoln said she supported the bill because of her own experiences.

Her office is on the south side of the Capitol where most smokers gather, she said.

"I take a long deep breath, walk through the door, into my office, and then I exhale," Price said. "But you still smell it."

Mark Welsch, president of the Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution, said 10 feet might not be far enough.

"Government buildings suck air through the doorways and into the buildings," Welsch said. "Smoke seeps in even when the doors are closed."

Welsch said smoke affects children and elderly people the most.

"They walk slower, and they breathe quicker," he said.

Thompson discussed another bill Friday specifically dealing with the safety of children around second-hand smoke.

LB1194 would prohibit smoking at child-care facilities.

Many child-care facilities are smoke-free now, but this bill would aim to ensure the safety of children at all facilities.

Thompson said children are affected by smoke in ways that adults are not.

Children are more susceptible to illness, she said.

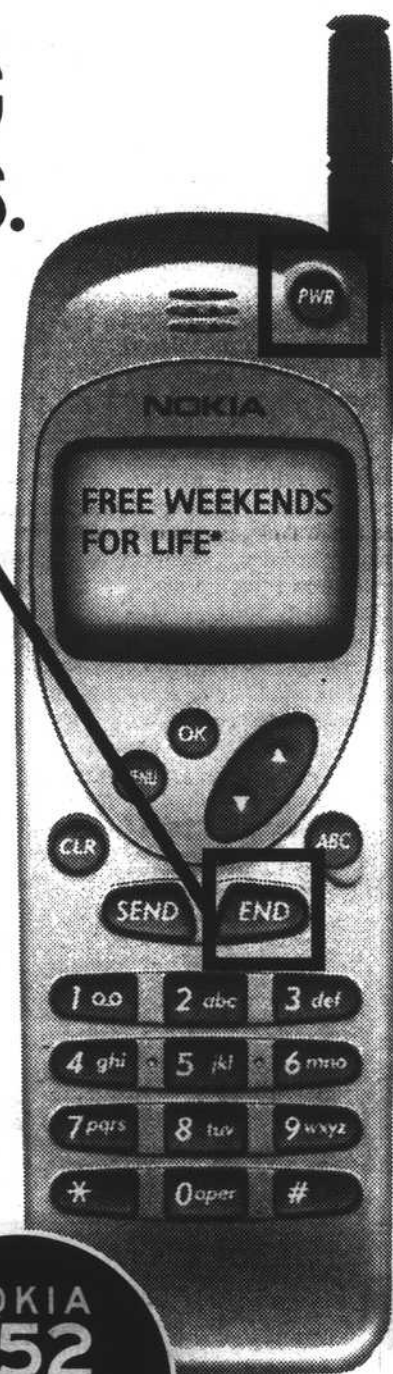
Common effects of secondhand smoke on children are asthma, sore eyes, upset stomachs, pneumonia and ear infections.

Becky Jelinek, a parent and drug-prevention educator, said it is up to adults to look out for their children.

"We have an obligation to our children to protect them from hazards that they can't protect themselves from," Jelinek said. "Children do not have a choice to walk away, and they don't have a voice in the matter."

The committee did not vote on either bill.

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