

Juvenile delinquency burdens parents

By Marcus Amick
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When Maria Fleming agreed her son needed to be detained in a Michigan juvenile facility for stealing a car, she never thought she would be expected to pick up the tab three years later.

Fleming claims she's being billed more than \$80,000 for the cost of care for the three years her 15-year-old son has been locked up in the juvenile facility.

And though her claim couldn't be validated with a copy of the bill, children caught in the juvenile delinquency system in Michigan are proving to be quite costly for parents.

"I agreed to have my son locked up to teach him a lesson," Fleming said. "And now they're expecting me to pay close to \$87,000 while I'm trying to raise two other children with a total household income of around \$25,000. I just don't have that kind of money," she said.

Billing parents for cost of care is part of a 1996 amendment to the Probate Juvenile

Code. The act reads in part: "An order of disposition placing juvenile into care outside of the juvenile's own home and under state or court supervision shall contain provision for reimbursement by the juvenile, parent, guardian, or custodian to the court for the cost of care or service."

According to a state official, the state law mandates that each county must seek reimbursement for the cost of care for juveniles from parents or guardians.

Twenty-five percent of the money paid to the county is to cover the cost for administration and the collection of fees. The rest is distributed between the county, state and federal government depending on who covers the cost of care.

"We have to order reimbursement by state law or make some kind of finding that the parents are unable to pay the bill," said Jane Varner, a Wayne County court administrator. "The parent or custodian has to do a financial statement when they come into court. The state court administrative guidelines and the

law say if they don't fill that out, full cost of care has to be ordered. So consequently you see quite a few orders for astronomical amounts that these parents can't pay," she said.

Varner said that a parent or guardian being billed can bring a petition for rehearing and come back into court and make a request that the bill be modified.

"But many of them don't," she said. "Then they get an order to show cause, which is where the parents haven't paid or given a reason for not making the payments. Then there's a hearing on whether or not the parent can be held in contempt and a garnishment be instituted. What happens at those (hearings) is that the parents try to negotiate a payment arrangement they can make."

Proponents of the measure argue that holding parents and guardians responsible for cost of care helps make them more responsible for raising their children and helps to cut costs for the care of juvenile delinquents in county and state custody.

But according to the 1996 amendment, the order is supposed to be reasonable, taking into account both the income and resources of the parent or guardian.

However, some parents are having problems paying the bills and others argue the whole initiative is counterproductive for a system that should be focused on "strengthening families."

"It's ridiculous," Alexander Goldstein, a case delinquency worker, said. "I have some parents who are being told they have to sell their homes or get a second job to pay reimbursement for cost of care. A lot of them have other children they're trying to raise. What are they supposed to do?" he asked.

Other opponents of the 1996 amendment declare that forcing parents to pay reimbursement for cost of care is punishing parents and guardians and not addressing the serious needs of juvenile delinquents and their families.

Marcus Amick writes for the Michigan Chronicle.

On black columnists

By Todd Burroughs
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Carolyn L. Bennett, a syndicated columnist for the Black Press for many years, once wrote that she uses a column "to celebrate and challenge, criticize, uplift and encourage all people — young and old, white and black, rich and poor, powerful and powerless."

I think Bennett's description should be placed on the wall of every educational institution that teaches journalism. It is a classic definition of what we columnists are supposed to be doing.

Les Payne, a columnist and a managing editor at Long Island "Newsday," once said the job of the black columnist is "to irritate." Or as Black Press publisher-activist Frederick Douglass would say, "Agitate, agitate, agitate!"

Pleading our own cause — and explaining it in terms that are honest — will not come from most other areas of American society. We celebrate those who have tried.

To Black columnists who toil in white media, God bless you. I hope one day more of you will find the courage to yell out loud to White America unpleasant truths about them.

Said Payne in a 1994 panel discussion with his fellow mainstream media Black columnists: "The opinions we reconfirm among ourselves we tend to pull up short within our columns. We seem to fear that they might be too shocking to tender white ears."

To my fellow Black Press columnists Manning Marable, Ron Daniels, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Marian Wright Edelman, Mumia Abu-Jamal, George Wilson, Ron Walters and all others who toil tirelessly for illumination, I say thank you for your work. Please continue to keep the faith.

We all stand on the shoulders of past black press columnists such as George Padmore, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Paul Robeson,

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Regulations tangle Ohio hairbraiders

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Across Ohio, hundreds of African-Americans may soon be required to license and register their hands with the state or go to jail. No, they're not martial arts experts. They are African hairbraiders.

The Ohio State Board of Cosmetology claims that African-style hairbraiders are "cosmetologists" and as cosmetologists, they must spend 1,500 hours (approximately nine months) and several thousands dollars to go to an approved cosmetology school and then pass an examination by the Board of Cosmetology. Schools, instructors and salons also must obtain licenses.

"The irony here is that cosmetology schools do not teach African-style hairbraiding and the licensing examination does not test it," said Dana Berliner, a staff attorney with the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Justice, which Wednesday filed suit on behalf of hairbraiders seeking to challenge the regulations. The lawsuit was filed in Columbus in the Federal District Court for the Southern District of Ohio.

"In the name of protecting public health and safety, the Board of Cosmetology licenses people to braid hair who have



no experience in braiding, yet it forbids others who are proficient from plying that trade," the filed statement read.

Recently, Board of Cosmetology inspectors asked the Canton City Prosecutor's Office to press criminal charges against a hairbraider for operating a salon without a license.

With Ohio's latest welfare reform program emphasizing transition from dependency to work, complainants say it is essential to curb regulatory barriers that impede creation of jobs and enterprises. And though county agencies dealing with welfare recipients have approved braiding as a useful job skill for welfare recipients, the Board of Cosmetology refuses to let them use the skill once they acquire it. That's unfair, they say. The Ohio lawsuit is part of a nationwide campaign by the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm, to ensure citizen's rights to economic liberty through similar lawsuits and public interest work. The Institute has opened up monopolistic taxicab markets in Denver, Indianapolis and Cincinnati, deregulated the cosmetology industry in Washington, D.C., and paved the way for jitney vans to compete on the streets of Houston.

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Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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