

# Backers: Prisons, parole board need oversight

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) - While legislative approval of several changes to the state's criminal justice system now appears almost certain, other proposals are still meeting with resistance.

Inmate advocates pushed lawmakers Monday to pass AB416, mandating stronger oversight of the Nevada State Parole Board and prisons. The bill is one of the more controversial elements of a package of criminal justice reforms that lawmakers are considering.

Prison officials have opposed part of the bill creating an advisory committee to supervise prisons, saying that it overlaps with a commission created in AB508, a sentencing reform bill.

The resistance has resulted in AB416 languishing in an Assembly committee. Senate Judiciary Chairman Mark Amodei, R-Carson City, said Monday he didn't expect the bill to make it out of the Assembly.

But other elements of the bill, such as judicial discretion for certain penalties and changes to the parole board, may end up being rolled into a third measure, AB510, said Amodei. That bill, which passed the Assembly 37-4, would expand the good-time credits offered to offenders who complete programs while incarcerated.

Both money committees have already approved budgets that set aside half of the estimated \$6.6 million in savings those credits should bring.

AB416 also would make parole board meetings subject to the open meeting law, and grant inmates the right to get an explanation of why they were denied parole.

Under the current system, prisoners often don't get that, said Assemblyman David Parks, D-Las Vegas, who has been pushing the bill together with its chief sponsor, Assemblyman Harvey Munford, D-Las Vegas.

Supporters of the bill say the current board operates with little oversight, despite the fact that it complied with open meetings laws several years ago.

Too often, inmates get denied their parole with little or no explanation, they say.

AB416 would force the board to explain its decision-making, and that's critical to getting inmates to improve their behavior, said Parks.

"In some cases the parolee is not allowed to speak, or to have anyone speak for

them," said Parks. "Or they went out (from the board meeting) saying, 'Gee, I had a great parole hearing. Why did I get a denial?'"

Parks questioned the parole board's claim that it will cost \$3 million to comply with the open meeting law, saying that legislative fiscal staff thought the job could get done for less than half that amount.

State Parole Board spokesman David Smith has said the costs of complying with open meeting laws are

substantial, including travel expenses.

Another section of AB416 grants judges wider discretion over enhancement penalties such as those for offenders who use deadly weapons or target the elderly.

Amodei said that he supports returning some discretion to judges, on the condition that the judges include in the court record explanations of how they reached their decision.

Without that information, lawmakers could return to

the situation of the mid-1990s, when victims' rights groups complained about sentences they called arbitrary and unfair, said Amodei. Their insistence on exerting more control over judges mirrors the inmate advocates' present insistence on reining in the parole board, he said.

"Big Brother is okay if he's your big brother," said Amodei. "Well, maybe you don't want to say what to do in every instance because one size doesn't fit all."

## Med school grads fleeing from state

LAS VEGAS (AP) - The vast majority of physicians who graduate from the University of Nevada School of Medicine are leaving the state to do their residency training elsewhere, prompting officials to call for state funding to reverse the trend.

Just nine of the 52 physicians graduating this year are continuing their medical education training in the state.

In the past five years, only 39 of 257 graduates stayed in Nevada to complete their training, according to the Association of American Medical Schools.

Overall, Nevada's physician-to-population ratio ranking is 46th in the country and is last when it comes to physicians in residency training per population among states with medical schools.

"People don't understand it's not where they get their education. It's where they do their residency training. That's the jurisdiction that they seem to stay in and open their practices or join a hospital," said Steve Sisolak, a Nevada System of Higher Education regent.

"This exemplifies the need for a Health Sciences Center. We need to get the private hospitals working on the same page," Sisolak said.

The idea behind the Health Sciences Center, which is only in the conceptual stage, is to connect the higher education system's eight institutions and establish a relationship between them and Nevada's private hospitals.

The goal is to standardize and expand medical training, such as residency programs.

Gov. Jim Gibbons has proposed putting \$110 million toward the Health Sciences Center, while the Nevada System of Higher Education had been asking for \$200 million.

The state's legislative session is in its final days.


To date, there is no word on how, or if, the center will get any funding.

Miriam Bar-on, associate dean of the medical school's graduate program, said certain specialty doctors are needed in Nevada and that means setting up residency programs.

"It would be lovely to offer residency programs for ENT [ear, nose and throat], radiology, pathology, orthopedics, urology and anesthesiology," Bar-on said.

"These are specialties that are in short supply in Nevada."

Only five hospitals in (See Health, Page 7)




# William ROBINSON

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