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That, Tinker said, punishes children and families and diminished the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce recidivism and break what she called "an intergenerational pattern" of criminal behavior that "involves several members of the family at a given time."

"We believe that for the state of Oklahoma to embark upon a policy which punishes children and ensures family disruption is wrong and unnecessary," Tinker said. "Instead, we encourage policy makers to carefully examine Senate Bill 671, The Community Corrections Act."

SB671, which died in committee last May, would have provided for the creation of a criminal diversion docket in certain instances and would have authorized the courts to impose a punishment as an alternative to incarceration in certain instances.

The proposal was authored by Senator Bruce Price, D-Hinton, and Representative Jack Bonny, D-Burns Flat.

"As the act is now designed, it would specifically address many of the problems that we have discussed this morning," Tinker said. "The bill carries very detailed provisions for required substance abuse treatment and supervision of the results of that treatment. Strict sanctions would also be brought to bear earlier in an offender's career so that patterns of crime have less chance of becoming a way of life. The court would also be given more information upon which to base sentencing decisions."

"...In terms of desired outcomes," Tinker said, "if a person can be adequately controlled and reformed in the community, it is much more human to try to keep him or her connected to family."

THE STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT DISCUSSES CRITICAL FUNDING NEEDS WITH LAWMAKERS

By Marta McCloskey
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Today, Health Department staff officials explained that salaries of nurses employed by the Health Department compares poorly with that of nurses employed by other state agencies and private businesses. "They work for a few years as a public nurse practitioner, then go straight to home health care companies," Dr. J.R. Nida, Commissioner of Health, explained to members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Social Services. "If I do not have nurses, I am out of business!"

Julie Crowder, a nursing student attending the University of Oklahoma, supported Nida's statement. "New graduates do not go directly into home health care. However, after gaining a few years experience as a public nurse, they leave to work for a home health care business which often pays better and offers flexible hours," she said.

For the Fiscal Year 1997 appropriation request, the department is asking for \$1,268,324 to aid in salary increases for public health nurses. In fact, the Governor's recommendation matches the department's request. Nurses would receive an additional \$400 a month with the request.

In addition to salary increases for nurses, the department said funding for vaccines and immunizations are not sufficient. Nida told members that 11 percent of children under age three are "falling through the cracks." That percentage averages out to equal approximately 90,000 Oklahoma children per year.

In the past, the State Legislature appropriated funding for those immunizations. It has only been in the last couple of years that the department was able to cover those costs through federal money. With cuts in federal funding, the department needs the state to help pick up these costs. The agency is asking for \$3,254,999. The governor's recommendation falls short of the agency's request by approximately \$353,000.

Sen. Bernest Cain, D-Oklahoma City, asked Nida how he proposed to reach the 90,000 non-immunized children. Nida said the money would mandate universal coverage for all children. As common practice, Nida explained that private doctors were already referring their patients on to

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am out of business!"*

*Dr. J. R. Nida
Oklahoma Health Dept.*