

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



doubled. There were 300 more jobs created in 1996 than in the same period of 1995 in both areas measured; those jobs created within three years and jobs created within the project lifetimes. Investment has increased over \$70 million.

Information for this report comes from a variety of sources, including newspaper clippings, internal Commerce Department reports, and local economic development organizations. This report lists only manufacturers and services wishing to make public announcements concerning their new or expanding firms.

These figures appear in the Oklahoma Department of Commerce's report, *Announced New and Expanded Manufacturers and Services, First Quarter 1996*. For more information, please contact Becky Kyle, Department of Commerce, (405) 841-5187.

—OKLA. DEPT. OF COMMERCE
05/08/96

CRIME & JUDICIARY

TRUTH IN SENTENCING JUST AROUND THE CORNER

■(GIT) Levels, matrix, schedules and enhancers are some of the new terms that may soon become common in Oklahoma courtrooms if **HB1138** becomes law. The bill enacts the Truth in Sentencing Act, changing the way Oklahoma sentences its convicted criminals. Lawmakers and state officials gathered at the Oklahoma Bar Center Wednesday to hear a presentation from the Truth in Sentencing (TIS) Policy Advisory Commission on the finer points of the bill.

"This is a viable product," said the bill's author, Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore.

Under the measure, convicted criminals would be expected to serve a minimum of 85 percent of their prison term before being eligible for parole or some type of community corrections program such as electronic monitoring. Currently, Oklahoma prisoners serve only approximately 15 percent of their term before being paroled.

"That is what truth in sentencing is all about," said commission member Bob Ravitz, "you know how much time an individual will actually serve."

One of the key points of the bill removes the responsibility of sentencing from juries and gives it to trial judges, except in capital

cases, where judges would continue to set sentences. The judge would determine the sentence by referring to four grids, or matrices, which clearly outline punishments based on the severity of the crime and prior criminal activity.

The four matrices (general felonies, drug crimes, sex crimes and driving while under the influence [DUI]) are divided into "levels," which determine the length and type of punishment, and "schedules," which determine the severity of the crime. Punishments range from under 1 month of a deferred sentence for theft crimes involving amounts under \$500, to 31 years in prison for manufacturing drugs.

Prior convictions are treated as "enhancers" to the sentencing process.

Departures from any level of the grid may be made with the consent of the prosecution, defense and judge or to any level on the grid based upon substantial assistance of the offender.

For the first time, judges would be involved in the plea bargaining process, which traditionally has involved only the prosecution and defense attorneys.

Stressing community corrections as a key part of truth in sentencing, Paul O'Connell, executive director of the commission, urged passage of the proposed Community Corrections Act.

Under the Department of Corrections (DOC), communities would be able to establish local boards to coordinate and administer sentencing options and assess long-term community sentencing needs.

"This provides an option to establish local community action boards to provide resources to increase the availability of statutorily authorized sentencing options and determine the long-range sentencing and treatment needs of the local community," O'Connell said.

He also stressed the importance of passing the Oklahoma Preadjudication Services Act as another step towards truth in sentencing.

Under the act, every felony arrest would include a urinalysis test to identify possible drug use. Offenders would also be subject to criminal history checks and a drug assessment inventory to better determine the best course of action.

HB1138 also requires stronger financial impact statements to accompany related fu-

ture legislation "so that the Legislature is better able to manage available [prison] beds and appropriate for new ones," Ravitz said. Along with that, the TIS Commission would be required to review each piece of legislation that impacts the state's criminal justice system.

Rep. Bill Paulk, D-Oklahoma City, voiced concerns about the provision, saying it would give the commission power to approve or disapprove legislation.

If the bill becomes law, it would not go into effect until 1998. The two year delay is to allow the new system to have a "trial run," giving state officials a chance to work out any problems and to gauge its cost. Schedule A (first degree murder) provisions, however, would go into effect immediately.

"Right now," said Attorney General Drew Edmondson, "we don't know what the impact would be because sentences don't mean anything anymore."

Edmondson referred to a recent Court of Criminal Appeals ruling, upholding the 30,000 year sentence — the state's longest — of a man convicted for raping a three-year-old girl.

Steidley said he expects the bill's conference committee to act on the measure sometime next week, with final action being taken before the Legislature adjourns May 31.

—BRANDON BEARD
05/08/96

EDUCATION

REPORT CARDS ARE NOT JUST FOR STUDENTS

■(GIT) To ensure "open" communication between communities and school districts the Secretary of Education, Dr. Floyd Coppedge, along with Governor Frank Keating, announced that schools will now have their own report cards, publicly proving their performance based on demographics and test scores.

Coppedge said the report cards have been sent to each school district for copying and distribution to parents and patrons before the end of the year. "This is an attempt to move Oklahoma back to parental and local involvement," he said. "This will also be used as a tool to show parents exactly how their school is doing."

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