

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



sulting from violent crime; and \$114,000 to cover the increased cost of testimony from expert witnesses.

The subcommittee is expected to take up those requests, along with the requests from other agencies not related to the state employee pay raise, at a later meeting.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
05/13/96

DOC REQUESTS ADDITIONAL \$96 MILLION

■(GIT) The Department of Corrections on Monday asked the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement services for an additional \$96 million in its fiscal year 1997 budget.

Sen. Cal Hobson, D-Lexington, had called the department and its financial needs a monster during an earlier meeting of the subcommittee. On Monday, the Lexington Democrat challenged the analogy, but the message was much the same.

"We've tried to save back every dime we could," Hobson said, "but regardless of what we pour into the bucket, it's not going to get anywhere near the top."

Annualization of this year's supplemental appropriation to the department will cost an estimated \$18 million, allowing the continued leasing of some 969 private prison beds in Texas and Oklahoma, the continued employment of an additional 150 staff members, the purchase of additional security equipment for probation and parole staff and energy contract payments for the W.S. Key Correctional Center.

The supplemental appropriation became necessary when prison officials ran out of alternatives for housing inmates in the state and county facilities. In addition to contracting with private prisons in Texas, as well as with a new facility in Holdenville, the department has been forced to temporarily house inmates in condemned cellhouses at the Oklahoma State Reformatory in Granite and at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester.

In a related request, Larry Fields, DOC director, asked the subcommittee to consider allocating \$26.5 million for the lease of additional private prison bed space.

Specifically, the department estimates it will exceed its population limit by some 866 inmates by the end of the current fiscal year. In addition to space to house those inmates,

Fields said, the department's projections show the need to phase in 1,530 more prison beds by the end of the 1997 fiscal year in order to handle the growing inmate population.

The department's request is more than double that recommended by the governor. Keating has proposed funding for 1,603 additional prison beds, including 1,383 private prison beds, 60 additional contract county jail beds and contracts for 160 beds in Mexico.

Asked by Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, what it would take to bring the prisoners housed in Texas back to Oklahoma, Fields and other DOC personnel pointed to the same thing: Money.

"There aren't sufficient beds in this state to bring them home," a DOC employee attending the meeting said.

Following the procedure set in its previous meetings, the subcommittee approved allocations to the department for the statewide employee pay raise at a cost of \$6.5 million and the associated OPERS contribution of \$558,375. Also approved was full funding of the department's contribution to the teacher's retirement system of \$22,500.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
05/13/96

SENATOR, OIDS DIRECTOR EXPRESS CONCERNS

■(GIT) A state lawmaker and the director of the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System on Monday expressed concerns that the agency may be approaching a constitutional crisis because it does not have enough funding.

Responding to a question from Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester and a member of the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement services, Oklahoma Indigent Defense System Director Robert Ganstine said his staff is "getting to the point that they won't be able to provide adequate representation" to their clients.

To best meet those obligations, Ganstine said, the agency will need \$12.4 million in addition to the \$8.1 million already appropriated to the agency, including \$821,595 to annualize a supplemental appropriation approved earlier in the legislative session.

"My concern is that I don't want to see us become unconstitutional because you're underfunded and undermanned," Stipe said.

"I want to be confident you have enough money."

The concern, Ganstine told the subcommittee, is that federal supervision of the state's indigent defense system could cost the state as much as \$50 million to \$75 million if it were determined to be unconstitutional. That amount is more than double the agency's total funding request of approximately \$20.5 million.

Panel members questioned Ganstine repeatedly about whether it might be possible to reduce the number of cases by better determining which clients were truly indigent or by collecting the cost of defending those determined not to be actually indigent.

"That might reduce the number of applications," Ganstine replied, adding that he could not estimate what affect it would have on the agency's caseload.

The subcommittee took no action on the bulk of the agency's request, following the procedure it established with its first meeting. Instead, members approved the agency's allocations for the statewide employee pay raise and associated benefits increase.

The panel is expected to renew consideration of the agency's request at a later meeting.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
05/13/96

KEATING, McCaleb LAUNCH MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN, THREATEN ROAD PROJECTS, EDUCATION FUNDING

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Gov. Keating's Transportation Secretary has been "shooting from the lip with little regard to accuracy" in his recent attacks on a legislative program for roads and highways, according to a Senate budget leader.

"I'm really surprised to see this kind of misinformation coming from Neal McCaleb," said Sen. Larry Dickerson, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government and Transportation. "He knows what the real budget numbers are, but at Governor Keating's direction, he's deliberately trying to mislead Oklahomans on this point."

McCaleb has been traveling around the state in recent weeks, threatening to cancel local road projects and telling newspapers and civic clubs that legislators are advocating a standstill budget for the Transportation

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