

## GCCA SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES TALKS BUDGET ISSUES

By Brandon Beard  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In a small and informal meeting Tuesday, Sen. Ben Robinson, D-Muskogee, discussed budget issue with members of the GCCA Subcommittee on Health and Social Services.

The agencies discussed during the meeting include the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, the Oklahoma Health Department, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Pertaining to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, a total of \$15.4 million constitutes the agency's additional funding requests for the fiscal year.

Among the higher items, are \$9.7 million for cost of living allowances (COLA's), \$4.8 million to replace money used to fund FY '96 and \$3.2 million to fund federal mandates.

Reported savings for the authority include \$5.1 million in managed care savings and \$1.9 million in additional HMO premium tax revenue.

Also included in the calculation is a figure of \$2 million to fund a UNISYS contract. According to legislative staff, the company was the only one that submitted a bid for the contract.

With total allocations at \$15.4 million, the authority has only been recommended to receive \$6.9 from the governor's office.

Sen. Howard Hendrick, R-Bethany, said such services provided by the Health Depart-

ment, like its dialysis fund, would be better served by the authority.

"The purpose of the Health Care Authority is to fill in the gaps where we have gaps in service," he said. "I think some of these services would be better served under the authority."

The Health Department is asking for \$9.7 million for FY '97. Included in this figure is \$3.2 million for vaccines and immunizations. Up against the governor's proposed \$202,000, the department's goal is to raise its vaccination rate to 100 percent. Figures from legislative staff show 11 percent of Oklahoma's children go unvaccinated.

A proposed project called "Children First" is carrying a requested allocation of \$2 million. Patterned after a program in Hawaii called "Healthy Start," the program is aimed at Oklahoma counties with the highest child abuse rates, including Garvin and Tulsa Counties.

The funding request also includes \$1 million to fund teen pregnancy prevention and \$60,000 to fund the so-called Ryan Luke bill (HB2053).

DMHSAS is asking for \$8 million to fund such requests as \$1.1 million for psychotropic medication, a line-item request that is higher due to higher costs of new generations of drugs, like Prozac, that have replaced older medications such as Thorazine.

A request of \$395,919 would fund a workers' compensation premium increase which occurred when the mental health facility at Vinita downsized operations. Similar increases of \$250,000 were reported last year.

Robinson said such increases are common when a facility downsizes, due to employees filing claims before losing their jobs.

The \$40 million in DHS requests include \$21.9 million to restore Medicaid administration funds, \$15.1 million to replace FY '96 carryover funds and \$4.8 million to restore cuts from the governor's office. Total recommendations from the governor's office total \$860,000.

Each of the 14 agencies listed in the proposal have funds to cover employee pay raises given in SB1128, totaling \$21,820,085.

The total subcommittee allocations are \$62.8 million.

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to meet the continuing monitoring provisions in the bill.

That, Boyd said on Tuesday, was not the case.

"We have no intention of creating a new division within DHS to fulfill this requirement," the Norman lawmaker said. Instead, she explained, the General Conference Committee on Appropriations is examining DHS' 1997 fiscal year funding request and is considering whether it will fund additional case-workers.

Because of that, Boyd noted, a provision was added to the bill that makes the continuing monitoring provision dependent on the availability of funding.

Boyd also fielded questions from Rep. Danny Hilliard, D-Sulphur, who asked how a provision dealing with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) would work. Boyd said the plan would require an annual commitment of \$260,000 from the legislature. That money would be allocated to the program's county-level branches as needed, Boyd added.

The most harsh questioning came from Rep. Carolyn Coleman, R-Moore, who said a constituent was "insulted" by a provision requiring criminal background checks of adults coming in contact with child care facilities.

The woman, Coleman explained, had operated a home-based day care facility for 13 years without having to submit to such a check. Boyd said the thought "it is better to err on the conservative side to protect children," rather than to err in a way that might endanger children.

The House gave the measure a 99-0 passing vote. The measure now heads to the Senate, where it is expected to be considered and voted on for the last time before going to Governor Frank Keating's desk.

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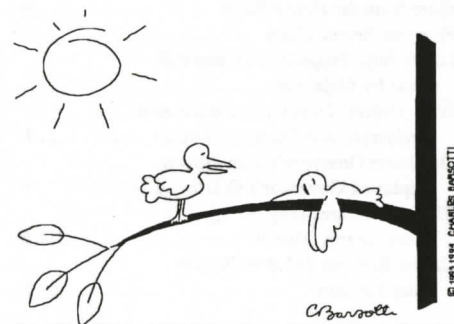
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"If this is spring here, we've got to get farther north before summer."