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PRISON CAPACITY: WEST. WAYNE

House Bill 4397 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (3-16-95)

Sponsor: Rep. James McNutt
Committee: Judiciary and Civil Rights

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Michigan's prison system is rapidly running out of room. Although a 2,600-bed expansion is expected to be approved by the legislature (and a request for further expansion is pending), no new beds are anticipated to be on line until the fall when a renovated facility in Newberry opens, according to testimony from the director of the Department of Corrections. One way to make some additional beds available by summer is to double-bunk prisoners at the Western Wayne Correctional Facility. However, the Department of Corrections act contains a statutory limit on the number of prisoners at that facility that was originally enacted in 1985 in response to concerns of citizens in the Plymouth-Northville area about the concentration of prisons and number of prisoners in the area.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Department of Corrections act to raise the maximum number of prisoners allowed at the Western Wayne Correctional Facility to 775 from 500.

MCL 791.220e

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency reports that the governor's budget recommendation for fiscal year 1995-96 includes an increase of \$3,371,100 for double-bunking 275 beds at Western Wayne Correctional Facility. The agency points out that if the bill is not enacted, additional bedspace would need to be constructed. Given that costs per bed for new space are estimated at \$20,900, the equivalent new beds would cost \$5,750,800 annually. (3-15-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would create badly needed additional prison beds. The state is about to run out of prison space. More new beds are expected to be open in the fall and further expansion is scheduled. In the meantime, this bill will prevent sending people who should be in prison back to the community and prevent greater overcrowding of already bulging prisons.

Response:

Some people believe other prisons should have statutory maximum capacities, particularly overcrowded prisons in Detroit, where a highly publicized escape occurred last year. Those prisons are holding far more prisoners than they were built to hold.

Against:

This bill is symptomatic of the problems the state faces with its correctional system. It just puts off the inevitable a little longer. Even the planned prison bed expansion program will only get the state through the next few years. What is needed is a thorough re-thinking of the state policy toward punishment and rehabilitation and a serious attempt at looking at alternatives to the constant expansion of the prison system.

POSITIONS:

A representative of the Department of Corrections testified in support of the bill. (3-15-95)

A representative of the Michigan Corrections Organization testified in support of the bill. (3-15-95)

A representative of the Women in Prison Task Force testified in opposition to the bill. (3-15-95)

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