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Local Agendas

Bill may cut \$7 million from prison budget

It would end the practice of keeping prisoners until they complete therapy.

By Gary Heinlein / The Detroit News

LANSING -- A state senator from Rochester is preparing legislation to correct what he says is an injustice that's adding \$7 million a year or more to the cost of running the state prison system.

Prisoners convicted of violent offenses are being held beyond their minimum sentences because they can't get into a required psychotherapy program soon enough, according to Republican Sen. Michael Bishop.

There are continual waiting lists for the 10-to-12-month Assaultive Offender Program. It's available at most state prisons. Moreover, inmates lose their place in line for the program when they are transferred from one institution to another -- common in the prison system.

"There shouldn't be a requirement to complete a program unless that program is available to you," said Bishop, vice chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Besides being unfair, the situation adds to pressure on prison space and the troubled state budget, Bishop said.

His planned legislation would prohibit the denial of parole to an otherwise-eligible inmate who couldn't finish the program before his parole date came up.

Barbara Levine, who directs the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending, said the state could save another \$10 million by providing the program to other inmates in high-security prisons.

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