

House backs anti-deadbeat bill



SALEM (AP) — A bill to suspend the driver's licenses of parents who fall more than \$2,500 behind on child support payments won strong endorsement Wednesday in the Oregon House.

The measure cleared the House on a 47-10 vote after backers said the license suspensions would help the state collect millions of dollars in back child-support payments.

Children are the ones who suffer most when a parent refuses to pay support to the other parent with custody of the children, sponsors said.

"For many families, it means the difference between being able to pay your rent or not making it," said Rep. Lisa Naito, D-Portland, co-sponsor of HB2357. "This has the ability to help thousands of children in this state."

The measure was sent to the Senate over the objections of some representatives who said suspending a driver's license seems too drastic a step for non-payment of child support.

Rep. Lonnie Roberts, D-Portland, said he objected to the measure because it does not allow for licenses to be granted in hardship cases where a parent can show that they have no other way of getting to and from work.

"I don't support deadbeat parents, but I have a problem with that section," Roberts said.

Backers of the bill said the license suspension would be used as a last resort against parents who won't pay court-ordered child support.

"I don't feel sorry for those sleazeballs who don't care about their kids," said Rep. Tim Josi, D-Bay City. "If they value their driver's licenses more than they value their kids, to heck with them."

Seven other states already take away driving privileges for failure to pay child support.

Oregon officials have estimated that suspending driver's licenses would increase collections by \$4 million in the next two years.

Meanwhile, the Senate is considering a related bill to expand a current law that allows the state to yank certain occupational licenses of people who don't pay child support.

A 1993 law allows the state to suspend licenses of commercial truckers, landscapers, electricians, plumbers, commercial fishermen, construction contractors and real estate agents.

The measure that is pending in the Senate, SB392, would cover a broader range of state-regulated occupations from doctors to tavern owners to day-care operators.

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Monument will honor firefighters

PRINEVILLE (AP) — Parents of some of the Prineville Hotshots who died on Storm King Mountain in Colorado watched Wednesday as a model of a monument was unveiled to honor all those who fight forest fires.

"We regard the wildland firefighter as one of the unsung heroes of our society, and we're pleased to announce that Prineville will be the site of the first monument in the country honoring the contributions of wildland firefighters," said Doug Hagen, whose daughter, Terri Hagen, was among the hotshots who died in the July 6 fire.

Twenty-eight men and women died fighting forest fires across the country last year, including 14 on Storm King Mountain outside Glenwood Springs, Colo. Among those 14 were 9 from the Prineville Hotshots, an elite U.S. Forest Service fire crew based here at the Ochoco National Forest.

Colorado sculptor David R. Nelson showed off his wax model of the monument. It depicts three firefighters — two men and a woman — working around a charred snag. The 11-foot-tall bronze statue is to be unveiled in Ochoco Creek Park in October.

"They are heroes to me, and I hope that when people visit Prineville to see the monument they will come away with that same feeling," Nelson said of the firefighters.

The monument will be "absolutely authentic, right down to the brand name on the chainsaw and the can of 'snoose' in the sawyer's pocket," Nelson said.

A monument to the firefighters who died on Storm King Mountain will be unveiled July 6 on the first anniversary of their deaths.

"Our monument here is different from that," said Hagen. "While we are particularly recognizing the Storm King Mountain victims, we felt it most appropriate to make a monument to honor all wild land fire-

fighters."

The \$120,000 cost will be paid in part by \$72,000 in donations to an account set up following the deaths on Storm King Mountain, said Norm Hesseldahl, Ochoco National Forest spokesman.

Parents of the Prineville Hotshots who died formed a committee and voted in November to dedicate the money toward the monument. They plan to raise additional money by selling gallery-sized replicas of the statue and figurines. Once the monument is paid off, remaining funds will go to scholarships in memory of the firefighters, Hesseldahl said.

Meanwhile, the Prineville Hotshots crew is expected to be available by mid-June for duty fighting wildfires.

Hesseldahl said Prineville Hotshots superintendent Tom Shepard is recruiting for the 20-member crew. Shepard and foreman Bryan Scholz, who both fought the Storm King Mountain fire, will return to lead the crew.

Assistance programs may be limited

SALEM (AP) — For Cynthia Hensley, receiving welfare and other public assistance programs for the past eight years has meant the difference between her health and destitution.

Hensley, a single parent of a 7-year-old daughter, suffers from severe diabetes and has been unable to work. Her medication alone costs almost \$300 per month.

Now the Salem woman is getting her illness under control and her life back together, by participating in a program that provides work skills and teaches people how to get a job.

But Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments to two years may not be the best solution to move people from public assistance to self reliance.

"I don't think people should live on welfare forever, but people should have the chance to live," she said. "Sometimes it might take a little bit longer for some people to do what they have to."

The Oregon proposals mirror a similar effort in Congress, with the idea being that the states and

federal government need to cut costs of public assistance programs while getting people into jobs.

State Rep. Charles Starr, R-Hillsboro, says his proposal to limit assistance payments to two years is a way to break a cycle of perpetual reliance on welfare.

"We need very much to get people off of welfare and get them back into the work force," Starr said. "The idea behind the legislation is to force them to make the break."

Sen. Gene Derfler, R-Salem, is sponsor of a similar measure in the Senate.

"We have locked people into the welfare system," he said. "We're going to try to give people an opportunity to get out of the welfare system. But you can't do it by asking, you have to do it by pushing."

Opponents say such reforms will push too hard on families already in tenuous situations.

Currently, the majority of Oregon's 40,000 welfare families rely on public assistance for just under two years, said Jim Neely, assistant administrator of state Adult and Family Services Division.

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