

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

— GUEST EDITORIAL —

April is Teen Pregnancy Prevention month. The Columbia County Teen Pregnancy Prevention Task Force is focusing on the issue of adults sexually involved with minors.

What is wrong here?

Imagine the following: Susan is 14 years old, living at home and attending high school. Jim, a 30-year-old friend of her parents, lives in the same house.

Jim and Susan become friends. She finds him easy to talk with and his attention is flattering. Susan falls in love and a sexual relationship with Jim begins.

Susan's parents know about the involvement of their daughter. They think that Jim is a fine boyfriend because he has a job, is mature and is helping Susan grow up. They do nothing to discourage the obviously intimate relationship.

What is wrong with this picture?

Jim is wrong. He is committing a crime. An adult who has any sexual contact with a minor, someone who is under the age of 18, is committing child abuse. Oregon law states this is rape, sexual abuse or contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor.

Susan's parents are wrong. Oregon law states that parents may be charged with child neglect for failing to provide a safe environment for their minor child. The law is clear; it holds accountable those adults who are in a position to protect and care for a minor child. Parents cannot give consent for their minor child to be involved in a sexual relationship.

Susan is wrong. She cannot give consent to be Jim's lover. Oregon law states that, as a minor child, she is protected until she is old enough to make her own decision. In Oregon that age is 18.

Statistics indicate that, more than ever, minor children are becoming the victims of adults. As quoted from *The Oregonian*, "Although children who become pregnant from abuse are rare, experts say sex-abuse cases occur in alarming numbers across the state. In 1995, the State Office of Services to Children and Families reported 11,000 incidents of child abuse, including 1,587 confirmed reports of sexual abuse." Oregon Health Division statistics show that of the girls age 15-17 who had babies between 1991-95, 85 percent of the fathers are over age 18, when the father's age was known.

Even though family members don't think the relationship is a crime, Oregon law states this is child abuse and must be reported. Either the local police or State Office of Services to Children and Families (formerly CSD) may receive the reports. When the crime is reported, it must be investigated. Law enforcement agencies and the State Office of Services to Children and Families work together, law enforcement is charged with the investigation of crimes against children and SCF is charged with the protection of the affected children.

Prosecution of an adult who is having sexual relations with a minor child is difficult. When the report goes to the district attorney, the grand jury may be convened (if a felony charge) to determine if a crime has been committed. The difficulty for the grand jury is finding that a crime has been committed when both the minor child and the child's parents feel the relationship is appropriate and not a crime.

Dalton Derrick, recently retired investigator for the Columbia County District Attorney's office, said that when he came to work in Columbia County 18 years ago, he was amazed at the number of sex abuse cases.

"It's never slowed down," said Derrick. According to the District Attorney's Office, 103 sex crimes have been filed since July 1994, involving 51 victims under age 18.

In Oregon there is a renewed interest in prosecuting adults who victimize minors.

Dave Lonning, Investigator, St. Helens Police Department said, "Adults who exploit minors for sexual gratification will be prosecuted under Oregon rape statutes." Convictions result in mandatory prison sentences (except contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor). Plea bargaining is not a possibility. Additionally, suspects may be required to pay monetary fines. Suspects can also be sued in civil court for punitive damages.

If you wish to help solve the problem, contact the Columbia County Commission on Children and Families, 397-7211.

STAY ORGANIZED LITERALLY AND VANDALISM!



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, Dist. 2

Prior to the passage of Ballot Measure 5 in 1991, schools received the majority of their funding from property taxes. The state general fund, which receives its revenue from income taxes, paid for about thirty percent of the total needed to fund schools. School funding, when analyzed on a per-student basis, was not equal from school to school for a variety of reasons. Some school districts received more funding simply because of their location. Other school districts enjoyed broad public support which was displayed at the polls when asking for an increase in their tax levies. We had both rich and poor school districts in Oregon, legally, because most of their funds were local.

That changed when Measure 5, then Measure 47, passed. Schools now receive about thirty percent of their funding from property tax revenues. Once the state became the major provider of funds for all public schools, a disparity of funding between schools became unconstitutional. Students have a right to receive the same quality of education no matter what school they may attend.

The 1991 legislature could not afford to fund all schools at the level of the richer school districts. They had a choice: reach equality immediately by lowering the funding for the richer school districts or strive, over time, to bring the lower paid schools up to the higher level. They chose the latter course. Richer school districts such as Portland would be "flat funded" while the "equity" district received gradual increases.

While the intent of the legislature was to strive toward a quality of education enjoyed by students in the richer schools, dissent among school districts became commonplace. The flat-funded school districts were forced, over time, to curb educational programs and fire teachers because they could not keep pace with inflation. The equity districts, on the other hand were eager to receive the funding levels enjoyed by the better off districts.

Impatient with the progress, a coalition of 26 districts sued for equity in 1994. Deschutes County Circuit Judge Stephen Tiktin ruled then that the state was making progress toward equality. But this year, after the districts asked for a new hearing on the issue, Tiktin ruled that the time for phase-ins of equal financing has passed.

Because of the court ruling, the Senate Revenue Committee approved a school funding bill that will bring Oregon's public schools to fiscal equality over a four year period. SB 346 would give districts with resources below the state average a sizeable increase toward the middle. And for the first time, it would begin significantly reducing state support of well-financed school districts.

None of the school districts is happy with the proposal. Poor districts won't receive the funding level they hoped for and the better financed districts will see substantial cuts in their funding. SB 346 reverses the policy set by the 1991 legislature and strives to reach equality by lowering the level of educational excellence to a mediocre average.

Schools are still hoping for a total funding package, counting both state money and local property taxes, of \$5.75 billion. The Republican leadership is willing to spend \$5.51 billion while Governor Kitzhaber wants \$5.61 billion. In the middle of this debate is the funding source needed to come up with the extra dollars; the 2-percent "kicker" tax rebate triggered because of inaccurate revenue forecasting two years ago. This type of stalemate diminishes the hope for a short legislative session.

ESD merger forces reduction in services for some districts

Educational Service Districts (ESDs) were originally formed to provide a variety of services for all school districts within a county. For example, ESDs provide educational materials to school districts in Tillamook County at bargain prices (due to bulk purchasing) and provide specialized educators trained to meet the needs of special education students. ESDs receive their funding from county-wide tax bases and from the state general fund. School districts, through a complex double-weighted formula, receive more state general fund dollars for students with special needs. School districts, to some extent, use these extra general fund dollars to pay ESDs for the services they provide.

In an effort to address the problems caused by Measure 5 and bring more equity of services and costs throughout the state, ESDs were reorganized in the 1991 legislative session. SB 26 consolidated many ESDs into regional units. The ESDs in Tillamook, Clatsop,

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