Four new prisons needed to handle inmate population

By John W. Frece

Maryland must build the equivalent of four 600 bed prisons, 926 more cells than currently planned to handle the inmate population expected by 1990, according to a consultant's report obtained by UPI Tuesday.

The new prisons and improvements to existing ones recommended by a consulting firm hired by the General Assembly would cost the state an estimated $311 million over the next five years, the report states.

The contents of the previously unreleased report are to be discussed before house and senate committees later this week.

The plan developed by the correctional services group, a Kansas city consulting firm, would cost the state $111 million more than the state' current plan for new prison construction or renovation of older facilities.

Of that, $92 million would be spent on the 926 additional prison beds an average of $70,800 per bed (in 1981 dollars) and the remaining $19 million on upgrading to maximum security standards cells at both the Maryland House of Corrections in Jessup and the Maryland Correctional Institute at Hagerstown.

"This is a minimal estimate, which assumes that officials will continue the current extrordinary efforts, including recent parole polices and restrained sentencing practices, throughout the decade," the report states.

On that basis, the consultants concluded the state need 9,989 prison cells or spaces by 1990.

Currently, there are about 8,400 prisoners jammed into a correctional system with only 7,637 dormitory spaces or cells space that under ideal prison management conditions would only house about 6,873 inmates, the consultant study said.

The state is currently under separate court orders to end overcrowding at the prisons in Hagerstown and at the state penitentiary in Baltimore.

Council limits radio volume

The city council gave tentative approval this week to a bill making it illegal to play a radio or phonograph in public that can be heard more than 50 feet away.

The bill must be approved one more time before it becomes law, but the measure drew no objections at Monday's council session.

Lawmakers attack bank practices

House members had another go-around this week with the Maryland banking industry as a committee heard conflicting testimony concerning the need for banks to make public more information on their loan activities.

Delegate Steven Sklar, (D-Baltimore) asked the Economic Matters Committee to approve legislation that would require Maryland banks to supply information annually concerning interest charged on loans made in the preceding calendar year as well as the cost to the bank of making those loans.

Sklar, whose legislation was supported by both the state bank commissioner and the head of the attorney general's consumer protection division, said without such information it is impossible to determine whether banks are charging reasonable interest rates on loans.

William Weaver, spokesman for the Maryland bankers' association, however, said the bill amounted to little more than additional regulation of banks, and, because it would apply only to state-chartered banks, would be of little value. Sklar said his bill would permit legislators to "see whether there is any reasonable relationship between what is being charged by lenders for loans and what the expenses are."

Weaver received support from at least two committee members, delegates Donald Munson (R-Washington) and Ellen Saurbrey, (R-Baltimore County), who said, respectively, that they opposed excessive regulation and preferred to let the marketplace set interest rates.

AFRO photo by Roman Hankewycz

HER HOME BURNED OUT — Ms. Gladys Basilio turns away from the debris in tears. Fire investigators have not yet determined a cause for the blaze, which caused an estimated $20,000 in damage. There were no serious injuries in the Silverhill Ave. fire, although Ms. Basilio's daughter and nephew were in the house at the time of the fire.

Senate kills fees for credit cards

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

The state Senate turned back an effort by local banks to institute an annual fee on credit cards issued by them this week.

"If you charge an annual fee for credit cards, what's to stop them, (the banks), from coming back and charging another amount?" asked Robert Douglass, D-45. He and the other senate members of the General Assembly's Black Caucus joined in approving a bill which would limit the annual fee.

A ruling last week by Supreme Bench Judge Marshall Levin freed local banks from most state usury laws, which had served to limit the yearly interest rates to 18 percent of the first $700 and 12 percent on balance over that amount.

"I'm not anti-bank," said Douglass, "and I've voted with the bank last year, when state banks gained the right to charge higher interest, but Levin changed my vote. I was going to vote against it, but Levin's ruling pre-empted the state."

As a result of Judge Levin's ruling, the only regulation the state can currently place on banks is a prohibition against charging fees for bank-issued credit cards, which legislators did with a vengeance Tuesday.

Although several banks have issued a warning that they may leave the state if the measure is not granted, Douglass shrugged off the threats.

"I think that if they leave the state, it will be because of economic reasons, and that if they wanted to, they could have left a long time ago."

Hampden worker loses job

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

"I'm tired of seeing our men castrated and our women made to feel less than human," said Mary Patterson, a former worker at the Perfect Bookbindery, located in the Hampden section of the city.

Mrs. Patterson was fired by the company in December, after she refused to work overtime. Her rider, Margaret Watkins, was also fired.

But Mrs. Patterson says that the reason given for the firings is only the tip of the iceberg. She claims that the plant "dehumanized" its employees, especially blacks who worked there.

"They called me a trouble-maker," she said, "but those who demand respect get moved out of that bindery. I've seen blacks come and go, people who had potential."

Mrs. Patterson produced letters from her former eemployer, Bindographics, Inc., which testified to her skill at her job, and shoved a reporter some of her work from Perfect Bookbindery. As she explained how she did her job, describing the various machines and processes which are involved in bookbinding, one couldn't help but be impressed with her knowledge.

But she was fired, and is currently collecting unemployment.

Perfect Bookbinding had intially blocked her eligibility to collect benefits, as they claimed that she was fired for insubordination, but has since amended the charges to state that Mrs. Patterson "had problems getting along with fellow employees."

Jay Swearingen, an official with the company, refused to comment on the firing of the two women, and denied charges of nepotism and racism levelled against him by them.

Mrs. Patterson has filed a grievance with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, but says that she does not want her job back.

"My concern is that, in this industry, too many blacks and woman have been denied the opportunity for advancement...too often women are put in a position of paranoia and men are castrated. After experiencing these injustices you get tired and give up, but then you are faced with the same thing somewhere else..."

MD. General names black director

J. Maurice Woodson, a 1975 graduate of Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, has been appointed assistant director of personnel at Maryland General Hospital, it was announced recently.

The announcement was made by hospital President Barry Bowers.

Woodson received a B.A. degree in business administration and, prior to accepting the Maryland General post, was the hospital operations auditor with Equifax Services.

At Maryland General, Woodson will be involved in all aspects of the personnel department, including work with the employment office in hiring employees and on the benefits plan.

Woodson, president of the Maryland Bible Institute and a free-lance business consultant, resides in Rockdale with his wife.

J. Maurice Woodson

Hospitals join plan to save expenses

About 450 hospitals and many other health care institutions in six Middle Atlantic states have combined forces in a group purchasing plan to save millions of dollars, a Maryland hospital official said this week.

Richard Davidson, president of the Maryland Hospital Association, said his group has joined with similar associations in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Delaware, and Pennsylvania to buy supplies and services in "enormous volumes."

The new consortium is called the Mid-Atlantic Group Network Shared Services representing about 450 hospitals with more than 130,000 beds as well as community health care centers and other health facilities.

"By purchasing supplies and services in such enormous volumes, hospitals can realize significant savings that would simply not otherwise be possible," Davidson said.

He said that the savings would be passed on to consumers.

The first consortium contract in which Maryland hospitals will participate is for the purchase of emergency procedure drugs and takes effect May 1, Davidson said.

College Park prof charges bias

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is investigating charges that the University of Maryland discriminated against a black art professor, it was learned this week.

The case involves James Earl Reid, a Baltimore artist who was denied tenure in 1979 and says his credentials are "as good or better than anyone's in the department."

Reid has charged the school with granting tenure to white professors with less experience, promoting white professors with the same or less experience, denial of tenure by a white dominated university review committee, and denying him access to documents relevant to the case.

Reid, who has been at the university since 1970, said he has received several letters of commendation, and was recently commissioned by Mayor William Donald Schaefer to create a sculpture monument to Billie Holiday, the Baltimore-born jazz singer.

Reid said guidelines established by the American Association of University Professors call for denial of tenure to be given in writing, but he says the university never did so.

University administrators and the school's legal and art departments have refused comment on the case.

Shirley Frasier, the EEOC investigation supervisor, has not said when the investigation will be completed.

Legislation may halt cameras in court

By John W. Frece

A house committee voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to halt the 18-month experiment in permitting press cameras or tape recorders in Maryland courtrooms 13 months before the experiment is due to end.

The 20-1 vote by the house judiciary committee sends the matter to the full house, where a preliminary vote could be taken this week.

Similar legislation is also pending in a senate committee. The judiciary committee, composed primarily of lawyers, was nearly unanimous in its opposition to the experimental program in expanded press coverage of Maryland trials and appeals that was approved by judges of the state's highest court, the court of appeals, late last year.

The experiment began Jan. 1 and is to expire June 30, 1982. But in passing the bill introduced by Del. Steven Sklar, D-Baltimore, the judiciary committee amended it by moving its effective date up one month, from July 1, 1981 to June 1, so it could go into effect as soon as practically possible.

Opponents of the court experiment said the introduction of cameras and recorders especially television cameras would jeopardize the ability of defendants to obtain fair trials and could discourage witnesses from coming forward to testify.

But Del. Pauline Menes, D-Prince George's, who cast the long dissenting vote, said the experiment should be given more time before being abandoned.

"I voted against it because I have confidence in the limitations the judiciary would put on how the cameras would be used in the courtroom, that they would be used in such a way as not to create a problem of equity for the state or the defendant," she said.

"I thought the public deserved an opportunity to observe the courts in action, and I thought we were acting precipitously."

Menes said she was surprised by the lopsided vote.

"By the time I made my statement (opposing the bill), there had already been a few of my colleagues to speak in support of the bill, but it was only when we took the vote did I find out I was alone," she said.

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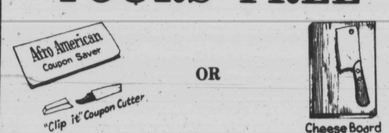

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