

Middle Tennessee briefs: Federal judge slates Jan. 2 hearing for DCS

11/26/03

A federal judge has set a Jan. 2 hearing date to hear contempt of court charges contending that the state has not improved foster care for 8,000 children.

A federal monitor's report showing that Tennessee has not complied with 84 of 136 provisions in a settlement agreed to two years ago will be the centerpiece of the plaintiffs' case to Judge Todd Campbell.

"We believe that the monitor's report needs to be brought to the attention of the court, and we think deficiencies set forth in the report need to be fixed," plaintiffs' attorney David Raybin said. "We want the agreement enforced. We think the children, who are our clients, deserve this."

Children's Rights, a national advocacy organization for children, filed the class-action lawsuit against the Department of Children's Services in 2000.

Campbell, a U.S. District Court judge for the Middle District of Tennessee, said the state must file a response by Dec. 10, and plaintiffs have until Dec. 24 to reply. The hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m.

Representatives from DCS and the attorney general's office declined to comment.

When the contempt motion was filed last week, Gov. Phil Bredesen said he was disappointed because the agreement gives DCS a 4½-year deadline.

Troopers to increase efforts

Beginning tonight, the Tennessee Highway Patrol will step up its highway safety efforts across the state for the Thanksgiving holiday.

All available troopers will be on the roads, said Tennessee Department of Safety Commissioner Fred Phillips in a news release.

The 2003 Thanksgiving holiday period begins at 6 tonight and continues through midnight Sunday, the THP release said.

During the 2002 Thanksgiving holiday, 15 people, including one pedestrian, died in 11 crashes on Tennessee roadways. Two people died in Davidson County in two separate wrecks.

Of the fatalities that occurred, 64% of vehicle occupants were not wearing safety-belt restraints and 45% of the accidents involved alcohol.

"Troopers statewide will keep an eye out for speeding motorists, safety restraint violators and impaired drivers — all of which are leading contributors in fatal crashes," said THP Col. Lynn Pitts.

THP's increased enforcement efforts are part of a nationwide traffic safety initiative, Operation C.A.R.E. (Combined Accident Reduction Effort), which targets those three leading factors in fatal crashes.

For more information, visit www.tennessee.gov/safety.

Center to launch fund-raiser

Four hundred electric candles have been placed in the windows of a downtown office building to raise money for the Technology Access Center, a nonprofit center serving people with disabilities.

The center launched its first "Light up a Life" fund-raiser this week, which it hopes will be annual. The fund-raiser will light candles on each floor of the Caterpillar Financial Building on West End Avenue based on the amount of each donation through the end of December. The candles can be lighted in honor of a special person or place.

Contributions of \$25 will light a candle on floors four through six; donations of \$50 will light a candle on floors seven and eight; a \$75 donation will light a candle on the ninth floor; donations of \$100 will light a candle on the 10th floor; and donations of \$250 or more will light a candle on the 11th floor.

Each night, the candles will be lighted based upon the number of donations received. Organizers hope all 400 candles will be glowing by the end of the drive.

To make a donation, call the Technology Access Center at 248-6733.

— Staff Reports