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LB 321, 880

SENATOR Dw. PEDERSEN: Thank you, Mr. Lieutenant Governor and members of the Legislature. First of all, I want to say that the Office of Community Justice was never authorized by this floor, by the people in this committee. If you look back at the original beginning of that program, it was called Community Corrections, and if you look up in the law book what it...what we wrote back in that time, and that was before I actually came into the body, it's got some similar things in it, but it doesn't have in statute what Community Justice is doing today. And some proof of that is in the last four or five years here, in 1995, there was a bill, LB 880, that came to this body, that would give them the authority to have this community justice program. That bill did not pass. They came back in 1998, last year. The bill made it to the floor but did not pass. Now in 1999, they've come at us in two different ways with the program. One is LB 321, which I told you last week offered by Senator Brashear. The other way was to put this line in the budget reading giving them authority to authorize money, to grant money. This will be the first time ever in history that we've given a correctional facility the authority to grant money to local programs. That's why it has taken so long for them to get going is because they don't have a program that's been authorized in statute. They were told they couldn't send the money out because it wasn't in statute, and if they have made contracts for that money, then they did it without the authority to do so. So we're not bound by that. Senator Brashear and I, he took his bill, LB 321, and I took my bill which I prioritized and I explained it to most of you on this floor, and I got 33 signatures on that bill, and I've stripped the community justice part out of that bill, and said we have agreed that we would study and decide what really should be done. I have contended all along that Community Justice is a duplication of services that we are now doing under the Probation Department. They have four people working for them, and four very well capable good people working for them, and I don't want this to be personal at all, they are very neat people, the people who have been lobbying you today. I know them personally and am glad they work for this state, but they are duplicating a lot of services. Probation, what is probation? Probation is a preincarcerated program, and the only thing that I will say that Senator Wehrbein said that I disagree with is, can they work with prisoners? Yes, they can work with county prisoners. They