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April 14, 2004      LB 1083

SENATOR VRTISKA: Next speaker is Dwite Pedersen.

SENATOR Dw. PEDERSEN: Thank you, Mr. President, members of the Legislature. It's not this...just this issue I would like to visit with you about, but another issue at the same time. I've worked with two kids in the last six months, both out of my office as a senator and with one of them as a volunteer, as a counselor, to have him come to me because he needs to have some follow-up with a substance abuse problem. I am in support of LB 1083, but I have a real fear of turning this completely over to the Department of Health and Human Services. I'm going to ask you, my colleagues, for those of you who have not been involved in the past, to make sure that in the interim and in...other than just when in session that you get involved in these type of situations. I do not believe that our job alone is to come down here and make laws and vote on laws and introduce laws and do the budget, but we should also be involved in the policing, or at least be involved in knowing what's going on in these areas, whatever your area of expertise is or whatever you care to be involved in and whatever bureaucracy. We do have to watch with a careful eye that we're not being taken for granted by either the bureaucracy or those agencies that are...or companies and people who are hired by them agencies. I have met two different social workers in the last couple months...not social workers, two different...the foster care people in the last few months who I know are doing it for nothing more than the money. We open up this money and we give it to these group homes and we ask somebody to keep an eye on them. What do they do? Maybe check on them once a month, some only once or twice a year, some only when they recertify or relicense. And why? Because we don't have enough people. I don't believe it's always because we don't have enough people. It's because of the way we deploy our people and what we pay our people. It's not surprising to me that something like this will happen that has happened...happen, because it will happen again without us being vigil at all times in doing our job to watch those that we have contracted with to take on this responsibility. It is so easy to walk to the next room or, in this case, take somebody and leave and not tell the other person. When you're working with other people, it's so easy