Money recommended for DWI center

By JOHN LaPLANTE
Capitol news bureau

Two state agencies Wednesday recommended the city-parish be awarded $200,000 to build a detention center for persons convicted of drunken driving, but they turned down a request for $313,600 to staff and equip the facility.

"We'll find the money somewhere" to operate the center, Willie Hawkins, director of the project for the city-parish, said after the unanimous vote.

The same agencies -- the Highway Safety Commission and a committee of the Law Enforcement Commission recommended District Attorney Ossie Brown's office receive the full $53,507 he requested to hire an assistant, plus a secretary, to prosecute drunk driving cases.

More than 50 local governments sought more than $4 million from the new DWI enforcement fund, created by the Legislature to help local officials handle the extra work created by tough new drunk driving laws.

The commissioners had only $2 million to spend, however, and most of the requests were pared down.

Gov. Treen, who sponsored the 1982 legislation requiring mandatory sentences or community service for persons convicted of driving while intoxicated, will have final say on who gets the money. The commissioners expressed confidence that most of their recommendations will be accepted by the governor.

The city-parish had requested $513,359 from the fund to build, staff and equip a 60-bed detention center adjacent to parish prison.

The request included money for a $2,200-per-month director, plus clerical, security and counseling staff, and funds for alcoholism treatments. Equipment requests included beds and medical supplies.

(Continued from Page 1-B)

recommendation that the city-parish receive a grant of $218,580, enough to pay for about two thirds of the staff and equipment requested, but not for construction.

However, the Law Enforcement commissioners accepted the Highway Safety recommendation.

"We appreciate the $200,000," Hawkins said. "It gets us on our way."

Hawkins said he would discuss the matter with Mayor-President Screen.

There were no immediate estimates on how long Gov. Treen might take to review the recommendations. Hawkins said the prefabricated facility could be erected in as few as 63 days, once the money is in hand.

District Attorney Brown had little trouble convincing the commissioners to recommend full funding of his request for another prosecutor, even though the staff of the commission had recommended the secretary position not be funded.

"No, he (Brown) doesn't run this operation," joked Claiborne Parish Sheriff J.R. Oakes, a member of both commissions, who presided over the

lengthy hearing Wednesday.

Commissioner Cliff Lawrence, a Monroe attorney, objected to voting on the applications Wednesday because, he said, the commissioners have not had a chance to study them.

Some programs that are being recommended for lesser funding are worthwhile and deserve full funding, he said, while others "seem to be nothing more than requests from Santa Claus."

"We don't know what we're approving," Lawrence said.

His motion to delay a decision on the funding failed by a large margin.

The Legislature appropriated the $2 million in DWI enforcement aid during a special legislative session last January.

The funding followed complaints by local officials that the tough new DWI penalties -- including two days in jail or community service for first offenders -- would overcrowd jails and otherwise overburden local governments already having trouble making ends meet.

The money can be used to build, expand or renovate jails, hire or pay overtime to patrolmen or prosecutors, and special services such as counseling and rehabilitation.

The staff of the Highway Safety Commission had recommended East Baton Rouge receive $200,000, enough to build the facility.

"The extras could be borne by the local government," Highway Safety director Steve Young said.

The DWI enforcement review committee of the Law Enforcement Commission went along with its staff's

(See FUNDS, Page 12-B)