

# PALO ALTO DAILY NEWS

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April 27, 2002

## Bill would give a voice to 'wards of the court'

Children who become wards of the court would have an adult assigned to speak up for them under a bill by Assemblyman Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, that won yesterday approval from the state Senate Education Committee.

Children who are abused, neglected, abandoned or delinquent often become wards of the court. While they are placed in group homes, shelters or foster family settings, they are sometimes left without anyone legally authorized to speak for them and make decisions within the public school system.

Assembly Bill 886 requires that whenever the court specifically limits the right of a parent or guardian to make educational decisions for a child, the court must immediately appoint another responsible adult to make educational decisions for that child.

"Without the immediate appointment of another responsible adult," said Simitian, "a child can easily fall between the cracks in our system, unable to access the critical services he or she may need."

A school-aged child in this situation might, for example, be unable to register for school because a school district of residence cannot be determined without the residence of the parent/guardian of the child.

Similarly, a child in this circumstance may have difficulty receiving special education services, be unable to take required medications at school, or may not have an emergency information card with someone to contact in case of an emergency.

AB 886 now goes to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

# BURLINGAME DAILY NEWS

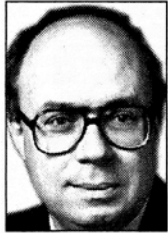
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May 2, 2002

## NEWS

### Simitian education bill clears panel

Assemblyman Joe Simitian says the state Senate's Education Committee has approved legislation that would protect the educational rights of juvenile wards of the court, or "court-orphaned minors."



**SIMITIAN**

Court-orphaned minors are children who are abused, neglected, abandoned or delinquent and who become wards of the court.

While many wind up in group homes or in foster care, often they are left without anyone legally authorized to speak for them or make deci-

sions for them within the public school system, Simitian, D-Palo Alto, explained.

"These youngsters are among the neediest and most vulnerable in our society," Simitian said. "Yet all too often these kids are cast adrift in a sea of bureaucracy. AB 886 ensures that every child will have a responsible adult to speak for them, to be an advocate and to make educational decisions on their behalf."

The bill requires that whenever the court specifically limits the right of a parent or guardian to make educational decisions for a child, the court must also appoint another responsible adult to make educational decisions for that child. "Without the immediate

appointment of another responsible adult, a child can easily fall between the cracks in our system, unable to access the critical services he or she may need," Simitian said.

"The current system essentially punishes the child for mistakes the parents may have made."

The bill's requirements are already in effect in the South Bay, according to Santa Clara County court officials, who support Simitian's bill.

"We do a relatively good job of assigning educational surrogates in our county, but unfortunately this is not true throughout the state," said Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Len Edwards, a presiding Juvenile Court judge.