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## Voucher issues ripple far

Vanderbilt panelist urges lawmakers to focus on goals, best use of money

**By Lisa Fingeroot**  
The Tennessean

When deciding whether to support Gov. Bill Haslam's school voucher proposal, state lawmakers will need to consider if ultimately allowing 20,000 students to take advantage of

vouchers is really the best use of public money, a Vanderbilt University professor said Thursday.

Voucher plans that allow public money to be spent on private school tuition usually create more questions than answers, professor Claire Smre-

kar said Thursday during a panel discussion sponsored by the League of Women Voters in collaboration with Vanderbilt's Peabody College.

The decision is complex and depends on the goal, whether the plan can meet the goal, and whether it is a good use of public money, she added.

If, for example, the goal is to help poor students in under-performing schools, officials might decide the money would be bet-



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ter spent on economic development and an array of public school choices.

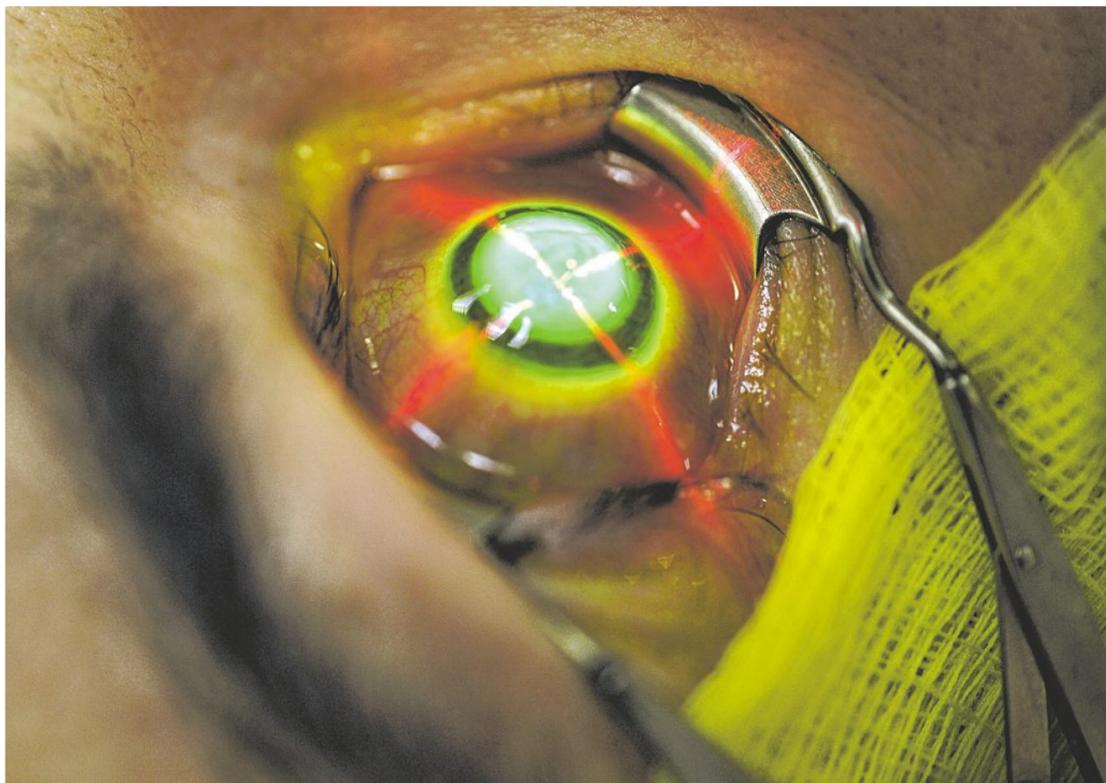
Smrekar would not give a personal opinion on the pending Tennessee proposal.

The plan Haslam announced in late January, the Tennessee Choice & Opportunity Scholarship Act, would give vouchers to as many as 5,000 students across the state to use in the next school year. By fall 2016, that number would increase to 20,000.

To be eligible, kids would have to be attending a school ranked in the bottom 5 percent

» **VOUCHERS, 2B**

### ADVANCES IN VISION



Dr. Ming Wang uses a new machine that fixes a type of eye problem with corneal cross-linking. Wang is performing eye surgery on Sean Leonard. PHOTOS BY SHELLEY MAYS / THE TENNESSEAN

## Eye study offers hope for discharged sailor

Experimental therapy uses vitamin, UV light to treat sagging corneas

**By Tom Wilemon**  
The Tennessean

Chris Clinard is counting on a new treatment for vision loss to give him a second chance at a career in the U.S. Navy.

The 18-year-old from Clarksville, Tenn., was 2½ weeks into basic training when a military ophthalmologist determined he had keratoconus, a diagnosis that led to a medical discharge. His cornea, the transparent film that covers and protects the eye, had thinned and begun to sag, causing vision distortions that would worsen.

"I'm kind of happy that the Navy did find it," Clinard said.

The timing was fortunate because he was able to enroll in a clinical trial of a treatment to strengthen corneas with vitamin blasts and ultraviolet light. The treatment, called accelerated cross-linking, is done with a surgical device called the Avedro KXL system. He received the treatment in his left eye in December and will undergo another round in his right eye this spring at Wang Vision 3D Cataract & Lasik

» **EYE, 6B**



Dr. Ming Wang participates in a clinical trial of a treatment to strengthen corneas with vitamin blasts and ultraviolet light. The treatment is called accelerated cross-linking.

*"I'm kind of happy that the Navy did find (the vision disorder)."*

**CHRIS CLINARD**  
Study participant



**SEE VIDEO**

Go to [Tennessean.com](http://Tennessean.com/) to view the new surgical

procedure using UV light and riboflavin to stabilize vision. Subscribers, go to [Tennessean.com/activate](http://Tennessean.com/activate) to access additional content.

## Child abuse task force pushes for consistency

Suggestions also include better collection of data, joint training, fairer system

**By Tony Gonzalez**  
The Tennessean

A dozen highly detailed recommendations for ways to better protect Tennessee's children were delivered in a report to lawmakers last week, but whether they'll trigger improvements isn't as clear as in years past.

The findings of the Joint Task Force on Children's Justice/Child Sexual Abuse suggest many changes that need the backing of the recently reorganized Tennessee General Assembly, where some reassigned lawmakers are still coming up to speed on child and family issues.

The 100-page report seeks more statewide consistency in child protection and suggests ways that the key players in child welfare—including law enforcement, health providers and the Department of Children's Services—can work together better.

"I hope there will be a serious look at (the report) and some recognition of the involvement," said Bonnie Beneke, task force chairwoman and executive director of Tennessee Children's Advocacy Centers. "These are people from all across the state, from all different professions. ... They've taken it very seriously and want others to take it seriously and to work with us as we move forward."

About 40 people, including doctors, attorneys and DCS employees, make up the task force, created by lawmakers in 1985. The group often spurs changes—in laws, DCS policies and methods for investigating abuse and caring for children.

But whom the report speaks to this year remains somewhat unclear because of the legislative reordering, say Beneke and Carla Aaron, DCS executive director for child safety and a task force member.

Aaron said DCS doesn't have formal discussions about the report scheduled with lawmakers, but she's "poised to talk about it."

DCS has already taken action on some ideas, Aaron said. As detailed in the first half of the report, last year's task force recommendations led to new child protection train-

» **DCS, 6B**



**SPECIAL REPORT ON DCS**

Go to [Tennessean.com/dcs](http://Tennessean.com/dcs) to read more about the problems plaguing DCS, including miscounts of child deaths.



Gov. Bill Haslam blamed media outlets for the high bill. GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

## Haslam: Fee for DCS records will stand

He blames \$55K tab on legal costs from media lawsuit

**By Chas Sisk**  
The Tennessean

Gov. Bill Haslam suggested his administration would not back away from its \$55,000 tab to produce records from the Department of Children's Services, even after the agency's new leader said the estimate seemed "a little high."

Haslam said during and after a luncheon appearance Thurs-

day before the Tennessee Press Association that news organizations brought the issue on themselves by refusing to drop their suit calling for disclosure of the case files of children who have died after being brought to the attention of child welfare workers.

The records have not yet been made public, and no organization has been billed for their release, Haslam said. He dismissed a suggestion that, as governor, he could decide himself to waive or reduce the fees.

"That's what the chancellor will determine," Haslam said. "Should we waive it for every-

thing that comes down the road?"

Davidson County Chancery Court Judge Carol McCoy ruled last month that DCS must release the forms its employees fill out when a child dies, and she said the department must provide redacted copies of all files on children who die.

The ruling came in response to a lawsuit filed by The Tennessean and joined by other media outlets in the state seeking greater access to records on child fatalities. McCoy said the records should be public under state law and ruled that the state must pay newspapers' court

costs for pursuing the case.

Haslam referred to those legal expenses and blamed media outlets for the high bill, saying they could have narrowed their request. He said lawyers for the plaintiffs refused to settle the case before it went to court.

"There was a corporate decision made to go to trial on this," Haslam said. "The chancellor came in and what she said, we're fine with. She's the one that said tell us what it will cost. It's in her seat."

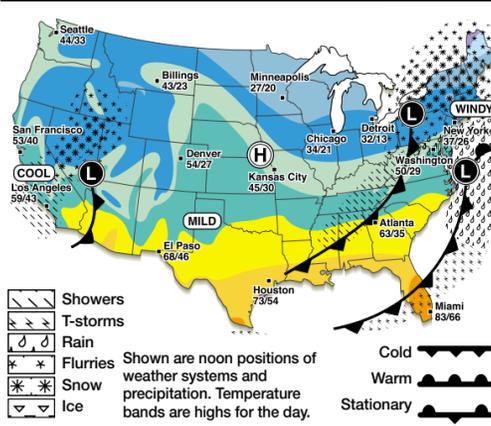
Lauran Sturm, an attorney for the Waller law firm who

» **RECORDS, 2B**



Weather forecast table for Today, 10 a.m., Noon, 5 p.m., 10 p.m., SAT, SUN, MON, TUE, WED. Includes temperature, wind, and cloud conditions.

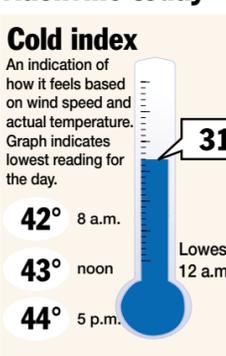
National forecast Fri., February 8, 2013



Travel forecast National

Table of travel forecasts for various cities, including Today, Sat., and Sun. forecasts for High/Low/Wind.

Nashville today



Temperature (°F) and Precipitation data for Nashville.

Moonrise/set and Sunrise/set data for Nashville.

Tennessee lake levels table for Old Hickory, Percy Priest, and Center Hill.

Barometer at 7 a.m. ... 29.98 in.



RealFeel Temperature and Precipitation data for Nashville.

Moonrise/set and Sunrise/set data for Nashville.

Tennessee lake levels table for Old Hickory, Percy Priest, and Center Hill.

As of 7 a.m. yesterday Lake Level Winds table.

Task force wants to revisit past findings

» DCS FROM 1B

ing across the state. And DCS has a major effort under way, called In Home Tennessee...

"I'm pleased that a lot of the action steps involve (DCS) partnering with a lot of the stakeholders," Aaron said.

Front-line work

In the report, the task force lays out ideas for joint training for the varied groups involved in child welfare...

The report found that child protective investigative teams, which exist in each county to make decisions about criminal abuse charges...

"I'm pleased that a lot of the action steps involve (DCS) partnering with a lot of the stakeholders."

CARLA AARON

DCS executive director for child safety and a task force member

more instruction for working with children and parents with mental illnesses.

Beneke and Aaron say some new training initiatives may already be helping, and Gov. Bill Haslam's recommendation of increased pay for front-line workers could help improve DCS casework.

Another recurring theme is fairness in the legal system.

The task force wants some paperwork simplified for families dealing with custody issues with-

out attorneys. And the experts want clarity about the appeals process that adults use when they believe a judge improperly "indicated" them for child abuse...

Contact Tony Gonzalez at 615-259-8089 or tgonzalez@tennessean.com. Follow him on Twitter @tgonzalez.

Eye study needs more volunteers

» EYE FROM 1B

Center in Nashville. The treatment also is offered for corneal ectasia, a similar disorder that can occur after Lasik surgery.

Wang Vision and Loden Vision Centers are the only ophthalmology practices in Tennessee participating in the study, but Loden has not begun recruiting patients, according to ClinicalTrials.gov.

Five people have undergone the procedure at Wang Vision, which can enroll 35 more patients.

Patients will undergo UV light for eight minutes, four minutes or two minutes plus 40 seconds in the randomized study. They will receive droplets of the vitamin riboflavin in their eyes while undergoing the treatment.

The study aims to determine the quickest and best way for administering the UV light.

The treatment has already been approved in Europe, where medical scientists first observed that people diagnosed with keratoconus who spent more time in the sun did not suffer as much vision loss as those with the disease who weren't outdoors as much, said Dr. Ming Wang.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration opened the clinical trial in July and expects it to be completed by December 2014, with an estimated nationwide enrollment of 4,000 patients.

Disorder is common

Keratoconus, the naturally occurring disorder, is much more common than the complication from Lasik, Wang said.

"We see patients anywhere between two to three, sometimes four patients, every week," Wang said. "It's not an insignificant disease prevalence. This is the genetic form — patients born with a weak cornea genetically. Over time, the weak cornea cannot hold the weight of the intraocular fluid, so the cornea sags forward."

Advanced cases of the disease often require corneal transplants, which carry the risk of a patient rejecting the organ, Wang said. Another treatment, implanting Intacs, a device that Wang characterizes as "a Wonderbra for the eye," also can pose problems.

"You put a segment in the eye and it is a foreign body," Wang added, "Extrusion of the Intac system can cause a lot of problems."

The cause of keratoconus has not been established, but there is evidence that it is hereditary and that it is linked to frequent eye rubbing, according to KC Support, a help organization for people diagnosed with the disease and their families.

Contact Tom Wilemon at twilemon@tennessean.com or 615-726-5961 or follow him on Twitter @TomWilemon.

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