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Manchin signs prison nursery bill

By Tom Searls

tomsearls@wvgazette.com

Female prisoners in West Virginia will be able to have their newborns nearby under legislation signed into law by Gov. Joe Manchin Tuesday.

The legislation (SB411) would provide for a nursery to be built at the Lakin Correctional Facility for Women in Mason County, which houses 290 female inmates. The bill would allow inmates who were pregnant when incarcerated to keep their children at the nursery for up to 18 months.

Those who supported the idea pointed out it is healthier for infants to be breastfed by their mothers and it also allows time for a mother to bond with her newborn.

Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, had urged her colleagues to vote for the legislation if they "really care about

a child who is born." A no vote, she said, "will be punishing the children."

But 23 delegates voted against the bill, including Delegate Kelli Sobonya, R-Cabell, who said the bill was "too broad."

The bill (SB203) would have been more controversial if state funds were to be used to build the prison nursery, but federal funds will be used instead.

Also Tuesday, Manchin signed a bill that he guided through the legislative process, which allows state workers to get cash advances from their state-issued purchase cards.

It also creates a new account funded by rebates from vendors for P-Card charges. The state auditor would deposit 15.5 percent of the rebate money into the new "Purchasing Improvement Fund."

But the bill was amended on the Senate floor to send the same amount of money to the

Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority, which oversees the all-terrain vehicle trails running throughout a number of Southern West Virginia counties. Those include the home counties of Senate President Earl Ray Tomblin, D-Logan, and Senate Majority Leader Truman Chafin, D-Mingo.

Manchin chose to sign the bill with the added language.

P-Card holders could draw cash for trips upon the state auditor's approval, under the bill. It would also allow the auditor to improve the purchasing program and its compliance system with P-Card funds.

Last year, the governor convinced lawmakers to allow contracts based on "best value," rather than lowest bid, and the awarding of no-bid contracts when there is only a "sole source" for the needed goods or services. That legislation also per-

mitted Internet auctions of state property, increased the value of purchases requiring competitive or sealed bids and nearly tripled the annual fee vendors pay.

Manchin gave his approval to 13 pieces of legislation Tuesday, including bills that:

- ▲ Designated the blue catfish a game fish (SB389).

- ▲ Give utility taxpayers credit for net losses for a year (SB540).

- ▲ Eliminate the need for people authorized to perform marriages to post a bond (SB550).

- ▲ Guarantee grave markers for certain veterans (SB387).

- ▲ Establish a method of monitoring physicians, nurses and podiatrists with substance abuse health problems (SB573).

- ▲ Require training for municipal election workers (SB596).

To contact staff writer Tom Searls, use e-mail or call 348-5198.