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## **A Day in Tallahassee**

Probation violators

A measure sought by Attorney General Charlie Crist to try and crack down on violent felons who violate their probation appeared unlikely to pass as the Legislature approached the end of its 60-day session Friday evening.

The measure's high cost appeared to have prevented the measure from gaining traction.

The proposal was a reaction to a couple of high-profile murders in which police arrested people who had been on probation for violent crimes at the time.

The bill (SB 608) would have prevented some violent felons from being released on bail without a written explanation from the judge saying the felon wasn't a danger to the community.

Legislative staff estimated that sending far more probation violators to prison, rather than releasing them on bail, could cost nearly \$70 million next year -- and more than \$600 million over five years -- because of the need for more prison space.

### **Online dating**

**Neither the House nor Senate had taken up an online dating bill by Friday evening, and its House sponsor said it would not become law this year.**

**The bill would have required dating Web sites to notify paying visitors whether they perform criminal background checks on their members.**

**Lawmakers and service providers had fought the measure (SB 1768), calling it a transparent marketing ploy by one company that already provides the checks.**

**The company, True.com, pitched similar bills to legislators around the country. Measures were considered in five other states, but none have passed.**

**A company spokeswoman said it was a public safety campaign.**

**House sponsor Rep. Kevin Ambler, R-Tampa, said lawmakers now plan to**

**study the shortcomings of criminal background checks, because of issues raised in the debate. Some local governments do not release information on their arrests and convictions to the databases.**

### Living wills

A measure aimed at encouraging citizens to fill out living wills appeared likely to die Friday as legislators neared the final hours of their session without voting on it.

The bill (HB 1345) would have required state Division of Motor Vehicles offices to offer sample living wills and allow residents to indicate on their driver's licenses whether they have such an advance directive.

Many lawmakers voiced support for similar measures after the Legislature failed to pass a bill that might have prolonged the life of Terri Schiavo. The family of the severely brain-damaged woman fought in court for years over whether she would have wanted to live in her incapacitated state. She left no written wishes.

### Alimony

The Senate voted 34-6 Friday to let judges reduce or cut off alimony to an ex-spouse who has moved in with another person in as part of a "supportive relationship."

The measure (SB 152) already passed the House and now goes to Gov. Jeb Bush.

Judges generally end alimony when the recipient remarries, but the courts in Florida have disagreed about what to do when the person moves in with someone else but doesn't remarry.

In both the Senate and House, some female lawmakers spoke out against the measure, saying it was unfair to women who in some cases contributed to a marriage only to have a husband walk out on them.

Many other states have similar laws, and some states go further, allowing a judge to cut off alimony when a divorced person gets a roommate.

### Wilton Dedge

The state Senate refused Friday to accept a House proposal for compensating innocent people who are wrongfully imprisoned for crimes they did not commit.

The issue came to lawmakers because of Wilson Dedge, a Brevard County man who was released from prison last summer after serving 22 years for a rape he

did not commit.

Dedge wants lawmakers to give him \$5 million for the nearly 8,000 days he spent in prison to compensate for his lost wages, the money his family spent to defend and visit him, and the work done by the lawyers who fought for his exoneration.

Sen. Daniel Webster, R-Winter Garden, said the House plan was nothing more than a "glorified claims bill" that would make Dedge come back next year and push lawmakers for compensation.

Instead, the Senate wants to let innocent people who were wrongfully imprisoned seek up to \$5 million in compensation for lost wages, attorney fees and other losses.

The process would work the same way the government compensates people who have property seized for roads or other public projects.

New judges

The Legislature agreed Friday to spend \$8.5 million to get 55 new trial judges in Florida, with half being appointed by November and the rest by January.

The House voted 113-3 on the bill (CS-SB 2048), which had earlier passed the Senate.

The Florida Supreme Court had asked the Legislature to provide funding for 108 new trial judges. Although lawmakers cut the request in half, it's been four years since they paid for any new judges.

Friday's House vote only came after lawmakers debated the distribution of the new judgeships -- which keeps them out of the 20th judicial circuit.

That's a five-county circuit in Southwest Florida represented by Rep. Bruce Kyle, a Fort Myers Republican who said he was singled out because of "ideological differences" with Senate President Tom Lee, R-Brandon.

"This is nothing but bad politics," Kyle said.

But Rep. Joe Negron, the top budget-writer in the House, said the Legislature failed to fund new judgeships last year because of a difference over appeals-court issues that Kyle pushed.

"It's time to get more judges in some courthouses throughout Florida," said Negron, R-Stuart.

-- The Associated Press

