

More Nevada Debate on Cult Bill  
By Brendan Riley  
Associated Press Writer

Carson City, Nev. (AP) - More pleas for controls on cults were aired Monday as the Senate Judiciary Committee reviewed a plan to allow for civil lawsuits against cults or any other groups which bilk people.

No immediate action was taken on SB343, being pushed by Sen. Bill Hernstadt who had to "deprogram" a daughter who had joined the Church of Scientology.

Scientology representatives were criticized by Sen. Thomas "Spike" Wilson, committee chairman, for failing to deliver promised documents outlining their various fees and charges.

"It affects the credibility of your organization," Wilson, D-Reno, told church spokeswoman Rita Thompson. Ms. Thompson said she had been advised by legal counsel not to deliver the information, which had been promised earlier by church president Heber Jentzsch.

Charles McClure, a Portland, Ore., lawyer and former CIA agent whose daughter Melissa, 22, is now in the Church of Scientology, urged the committee to pass some controls in order to regulate cult activities.

"The point I want to make is: My daughter isn't my daughter. My daughter's mind is snapped." He said, "My daughter is still in the Church of Scientology, and there is nothing I can do."

McClure said the church offers "therapy" courses, and should have some kind of regulation just as psychiatrists, psychologists or counselors have.

McClure said SB343 dealt with ways to recover money and damages from cults which bilk members, but that's "a very small part" of the problem. "These people are playing with the minds of our young men and women," he said.

Erica Heftmann of Pasadena, Calif., former Unification Church fund-raiser and author of "The Dark Side of the Moonies," said church members "descended like locusts" and "hit up everything that moved, every warm body" while raising money.

She added that the money was not spent for the purpose stated by the Church of Unification, which preaches what she described as "a complicated, dopey doctrine about saving the world" even if it means lying to people - the practice of "heavenly deception."

UCLA Law Professor Richard Delgado described SB343 as "very plainly constitutional." He said it would help to stop fraud, and really didn't say anything more than what's already in general Nevada fraud statutes.

Responding to committee questions on whether the law would apply even to traditional churches or even groups such as the Boy Scouts, Delgado added that anyone can sue anyone else now. Under the existing law or the proposal, a frivolous suit wouldn't have "a chance in the world," he added.

Lee Boothby, a Michigan attorney hired by Scientologists to testify, said SB343 still appeared to be on weak legal footing. But he said he had no problem with a proposed five-day "cooling off" period during which members of any organization could get back money paid for courses.

Boothby also questioned part of the bill saying charitable contributions must be used for a "substantially similar" purpose as that stated when the contribution is solicited.

If the money is spent for some other reason, a judge could impose a trust on the organization's assets. Boothby said that could cause constitutional problems for many traditional churches.

But Wilson said the measure was really aimed at "commercial activity" whether it occurred under the guise of a religion or something else.

AP-LA 05-02-83 1211 PDT