

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA

Session 2015

Legislative Incarceration Fiscal Note

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 378 (First Edition)

SHORT TITLE: Increase Punishment/Misd. Death by Vehicle.

SPONSOR(S): Senator Bingham

FISCAL IMPACT					
(\$ in millions)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Estimate Available					
	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20
State Impact					
General Fund Revenues:					
General Fund Expenditures					
State Positions:					
NET STATE IMPACT	Likely budget cost. See Assumptions & Methodology section for additional details.				
PRINCIPAL DEPARTMENT(S) & PROGRAM(S) AFFECTED:					
Administrative Office of the Courts; Indigent Defense Services; Department of Public Safety					
EFFECTIVE DATE: December 1, 2015					
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS:					
None					

FISCAL IMPACT SUMMARY:

The proposed bill may have a fiscal impact to address a new chargeable offense being enforced, adjudicated, and having penalties applied to those convicted of the new offense. However, given that there is no historical data on this new offense or similar offenses to use as a proxy for predicting the total number of new offenses, the Fiscal Research Division cannot reasonably estimate the total additional costs that may be incurred. The following costs may be incurred for every one person charged and convicted of this crime:

- Administrative Office of the Courts: \$286 per disposition
- Indigent Defense Services: \$204 per disposition
- Department of Public Safety (DPS) - Prison Section: No cost
- DPS - Community Corrections: Minimum of \$2,219 per conviction resulting in supervised probation

Please see the Assumptions and Methodology section for additional information.

BILL SUMMARY:

The bill adds a subsection (a4) to G.S. 20-141.4, Felony and misdemeanor death by vehicle; felony serious injury by vehicle; aggravated offenses; repeat felony death by vehicle. Under the new subsection, it is a Class A1 misdemeanor if a person unintentionally causes the death of another person while engaged in the violation of any State law or local ordinance applying to the operation of a vehicle or to the regulation of traffic, other than impaired driving, the violation of that law was the cause of death, and the person has three or more previous convictions for a violation of a those laws, other than impaired driving, within seven years of the date of the offense. Notwithstanding the misdemeanor punishment chart in G.S. 15A-1340.23, a person convicted of Aggravated Misdemeanor Death by Vehicle may be sentenced to an active sentence of not more than one year.

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY:

General

The Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission prepares prison population projections for each bill containing a criminal penalty. The Commission assumes for such bills that expanding existing or creating new criminal offenses produces no deterrent or incapacitative effect on crime. Therefore, the Fiscal Research Division does not assume deterrent effects for any criminal penalty bill.

S.L. 2011-192 (H.B. 642), the Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA), made changes to North Carolina's court system, corrections system (both to prisons and probation), and to post-release supervision. All F-I felons are now subject to nine months of post-release supervision (PRS). B1-E felony PRS has been increased from nine months to twelve months. Due to the lack of historical data about JRA implementation, it is not possible to estimate the number of prison beds that may be needed as a result of revocations.

JRA also created the Statewide Misdemeanant Confinement Program (SMCP) for housing misdemeanants with sentences between 90 and 180 days in county jails (misdemeanants with shorter sentences were already the responsibility of the counties). County participation in the program is voluntary. The SMCP pays participating counties for misdemeanants' housing, transportation, and medical costs. In 2014, the program was expanded to include all misdemeanants with sentences longer than 90 days. The Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission does not track county jail capacity, so it is not possible to estimate the impact of new or increased misdemeanor penalties on county jails.

Judicial Branch

The Administrative Office of the Courts provides Fiscal Research with a fiscal impact analysis for most criminal penalty bills. For such bills, fiscal impact is typically based on the assumption that court time will increase due to anticipated increases in trials and corresponding increases in workload for judges, clerks, and prosecutors. This increased court time is also expected to result in greater expenditures for jury fees and indigent defense.

The proposed bill creates a new Class A1 misdemeanor offense. Because this is a new offense that can only be charged based on prior convictions, AOC does not have historical data upon which to estimate the number of charges that might occur. AOC's database contains information about the number of prior convictions, but not the nature of the specific offenses that are used to calculate the number of prior convictions. AOC provides estimates of the average cost to the court for a charge by offense class. For every additional person charged with a Class A1 misdemeanor, the average cost to the court would be \$286.

The Office of Indigent Defense Services (IDS) has provided Fiscal Research with the frequency and cost of indigent defense services for each level of crime, including the cost differentials for district and superior

court with and without a trial and the percentage of cases handled in each category. Fiscal Research used this data to calculate a weighted average of IDS costs. In FY 2011-12, 52% of Class A1 misdemeanor cases were handled through IDS. The weighted average cost of a new Class A1 misdemeanor is \$204 per case for a private appointed counsel (PAC) attorney. This estimate assumes the appointment of a PAC attorney. In districts that have Public Defender offices, cases may be handled by those offices. In those instances, this cost may not be incurred.

Department of Public Safety –Prison Section

This bill creates a new Class A1 misdemeanor offense. The North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission expects no impact on the prison population because all misdemeanor offenders who receive active sentences will serve them in the local jail. Therefore, the Department of Public Safety does not anticipate an impact on prison custody projections.

Department of Public Safety – Community Correction Section

All misdemeanor offenders may be given non-active (intermediate or community) sentences exclusively, or in conjunction with imprisonment (split-sentence). Sanctions include electronic house arrest, community service, substance abuse treatment, participation in educational or vocational skills development, payment of court costs, fines, and restitution, and short-term jail sentences not exceeding six days per month.

JRA essentially eliminated the distinction between “community” and “intermediate” supervision. Under structured sentencing, the two types of supervision were each defined by a set of specific sanctions. Under JRA, both community and intermediate probation may now include electronic monitoring, short-term periods of confinement, substance abuse assessment, monitoring, and treatment, participation in educational programs or vocational skills development. Whether a probationer is subject to more stringent conditions is determined by the results of a risk-needs assessment administered by the Department of Public Safety.

All types of post-release supervision, including intermediate or community sanctions, are supervised by the Community Corrections Section (CCS); CCS also oversees community service. General post-release supervision and supervision of intermediate and community offenders by a probation officer costs \$130.50 per offender, per month; no cost is assumed for those receiving unsupervised probation, or who are only ordered to pay fines, fees, or restitution. Total costs are based on average supervision length and the percentage of offenders (per offense class) sentenced to active sentences requiring post-release supervision, intermediate sanctions and supervised probation.

In FY 2013-14, 35% of Class A1 misdemeanor offenders received active sentences; 65% received probation. Active misdemeanor sentences of less than 180 days are served in local jails and do not require any post-release supervision. The average length of probation imposed for this offense class was 17 months. Therefore, at a minimum, one conviction resulting in supervised probation will require at least 17 months of supervision. The cost of 17 months of supervision is \$2,219 per offender (\$130.50 per month times 17 months).¹

SOURCES OF DATA: Department of Public Safety; Administrative Office of the Courts; North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; Office of Indigent Defense Services.

¹ Due to the effective date of December 1, 2015 and the typical lag time between charge and conviction (6 months), little impact is assumed for CCS in FY 2015-16. Though some offenders may come under CCS supervision during this time, this note assumes an even entry over the course of FY 2016-17.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS: None

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