

Department of Planning and Budget 2020 Fiscal Impact Statement

1. Bill Number: SB838

House of Origin ☐ Introduced ☐ Substitute ☐ Engrossed
Second House ☐ In Committee ☐ Substitute ☒ Enrolled

2. Patron: Ebbin

3. Committee: Passed Both Houses

4. Title: Nonpayment of wages; private action; liability for payment of wages due.

5. Summary: This bill provides that an employee has a private cause of action against an employer who fails to pay wages to recover the amount of wages due plus interest at eight percent annually from the date the wages were due. If the court finds that the employer knowingly failed to pay wages to an employee, the court shall award the employee (i) reasonable attorney fees and other costs and (ii) unless the court finds that the employer's failure to pay was because of a bona fide dispute between the employer and employee, an amount equal to triple the amount of wages due. The measure provides that an employer that knowingly fails or refuses to pay wages, unless the failure to pay was because of a bona fide dispute between the employer and its employee, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if the value of the wages earned and not paid by the employer is less than \$10,000 or a Class 6 felony if the value of the wages earned and not paid is \$10,000 or more or if the conviction is a second or subsequent conviction. Currently, criminal liability attaches if an employer's nonpayment of wages is willful and with intent to defraud.

6. Budget Amendment Necessary: Yes, Item 402, HB/SB30 as Introduced.

7. Fiscal Impact Estimates: Final, see item 8.

7a. Expenditure Impact:

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Dollars</i>	<i>Positions</i>	<i>Fund</i>
2020	N/A	N/A	N/A
2021	\$50,000	0	GF

8. Fiscal Implications: It is anticipated that this bill will have a fiscal impact on the Department of Corrections; however, Conference amendments to HB30/SB30 provide funding to account for the bill's estimated bedspace impacts. Additionally, it is anticipated that any impact to the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) can be absorbed within existing resources.

DOLI indicates that the agency's payment of wage collections are mostly for small claims that average about \$150. While a small amount of these claimants will pursue the wage claim on their own, DOLI anticipates that the agency will still receive and enforce the same

number of complaints for collection. Larger claims for which DOLI has limited resources to pursue would be pursued by private attorneys directly on behalf of the affected employee, which will have little or no impact on DOLI's Labor Law division.

This bill provides that an employer that knowingly fails or refuses to pay wages, unless the failure to pay was because of a bona fide dispute between the employer and its employee, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if the value of the wages earned and not paid by the employer is less than \$10,000. Anyone convicted of a Class 1 misdemeanor is subject to a sentence of up to 12 months in jail. There is not enough information available to reliably estimate the increase in jail population as a result of this proposal. However, any increase in jail population will increase costs to the state. The Commonwealth currently pays the localities \$4.00 a day for each misdemeanant or otherwise local-responsible prisoner held in a jail. It also funds a large portion of the jails' operating costs, e.g. correctional officers. The state's share of these costs on a per prisoner, per day basis varies from locality to locality. However, according to the Compensation Board's most recent Jail Cost Report (November 2019), the estimated total state support for local jails averaged \$34.07 per inmate, per day in FY 2018.

Additionally, the bill provides that that an employer that knowingly fails or refuses to pay wages, unless the failure to pay was because of a bona fide dispute between the employer and its employee, is guilty of a Class 6 felony if the value of the wages earned and not paid by the employer is \$10,000 or more or if the conviction is a second or subsequent conviction. For someone convicted of a Class 6 felony, a judge has the option of sentencing him to up to 12 months in jail, or one to five years in prison. Therefore, this proposal could result in an increase in the number of persons sentenced to jail or prison.

There is not enough information available to reliably estimate the increase in jail population as a result of this proposal. However, any increase in jail population will increase costs to the state. The Commonwealth currently pays the localities \$4.00 a day for each misdemeanant or otherwise local-responsible prisoner held in a jail and \$12.00 a day for each state-responsible prisoner. It also funds a considerable portion of the jails' operating costs, e.g. correctional officers. The state's share of these costs on a per prisoner, per day basis varies from locality to locality. However, according to the Compensation Board's most recent Jail Cost Report (November 2019), the estimated total state support for local jails averaged \$34.07 per inmate, per day in FY 2018.

Due to the lack of data, the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission has concluded, pursuant to §30-19.1:4 of the Code of Virginia, that the impact of the proposed legislation on state-responsible (prison) bed space cannot be determined. In such cases, Chapter 854, 2019 Acts of Assembly, requires that a minimum impact of \$50,000 be assigned to the bill. Conference amendments to HB30/SB30 provide funding to account for the estimated bedspace impacts associated with this bill.

- 9. Specific Agency or Political Subdivisions Affected:** Departments of Labor and Industry, and Corrections; courts.

10. Technical Amendment Necessary: No.

11. Other Comments: This bill is similar to HB 123.