



Fiscal Impact Statement for Proposed Legislation

Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission

House Bill No. 718

Reenrolled

(Patron Prior to Reenrollment – Kilgore)

LD #: Reenrolled

Date: 4/18/2012

Topic: Transfer of juveniles to circuit court

Fiscal Impact Summary:

- **State Adult Correctional Facilities:**
\$50,000*
- **Local Adult Correctional Facilities:**
Cannot be determined
- **Adult Community Corrections Programs:**
Cannot be determined

- **Juvenile Correctional Centers:**
Cannot be determined, likely to be small
- **Juvenile Detention Facilities:**
Cannot be determined, likely to be small

* The estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 890 of the 2011 Acts of Assembly requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of \$50,000.

Summary of Proposed Legislation:

The proposal amends § 16.1-269.1, which outlines the criteria and procedures for transferring juveniles to circuit court for trial as adults.

The proposal expands the list of offenses in § 16.1-269.1(C) to include:

- Third or subsequent violations of § 18.2-248 (selling, distributing, etc., a controlled substance), provided that the adjudications occurred after the juvenile was at least 14 years of age;
- Third or subsequent violations of § 18.2-248.03 (selling, distributing, etc., methamphetamine), provided that the adjudications occurred after the juvenile was at least 14 years of age; and
- Felony violations of § 18.2-248.5 (selling, distributing, etc., anabolic steroids) if the offender has two or more prior adjudications under the same statute, provided that the adjudications occurred after the juvenile was at least 14 years of age.

For offenses listed in § 16.1-269.1(C), upon notice of the prosecutor's intent to pursue transfer, the juvenile court must conduct a preliminary hearing and, upon finding probable cause, must certify the charges to the grand jury (thus divesting the juvenile court of any jurisdiction in the case).¹ Currently, following motion of the prosecutor, juveniles charged with felony drug crimes can be transferred to circuit court under § 16.1-269.1(A) at the discretion of the juvenile court judge.

By expanding the list of offenses in § 16.1-269.1(C), the proposal also expands the definition of "violent juvenile felony" under § 16.1-228 to include the enumerated drug offenses.

¹ If the juvenile court judge does not find probable cause or dismisses the charges, the Commonwealth's attorney may seek a direct indictment in circuit court.

Analysis:

Court Service Units (CSUs), operated by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), serve as the point of entry into the juvenile justice system. An “intake” occurs when a juvenile is brought before a CSU intake officer for one or more alleged law violations. If the charges are not otherwise resolved, a petition can be filed against the juvenile and the case will proceed to court. Subject to the provisions of § 16.1-269.1, juveniles 14 years of age or older may be transferred to circuit for trial as adults. DJJ analyzed intake records for fiscal years 2007 through 2011 involving juveniles who were at least 14 years of age. The Department of Juvenile Justice estimates that this bill will affect less than 40 juvenile cases per year. In the last five fiscal years, there was an average of 43 petitioned intakes per year for juveniles, on drug distribution offenses, who had a one or more prior adjudication for the same offense.² The proposal addresses a subsection of these juveniles; specifically, the proposal would only impact juveniles 14 years of age or older charged with a listed drug offense who had two or more prior adjudications for the same offense and the adjudications occurred after the juvenile was at least 14 years of age.

Impact of Proposed Legislation:

State adult correctional facilities. The proposal expands the juvenile transfer provisions in subsection (C) of § 16.1-269.1. Specifically, the proposal would eliminate the discretion of juvenile court judges to retain jurisdiction over juveniles charged with certain specified offenses under certain circumstances. Following notice from the prosecutor and upon finding probable cause, the juvenile court judge would be required to transfer the charge (and all ancillary charges) to circuit court. If the juvenile court judge does not find probable cause or dismisses the charges, the Commonwealth’s attorney could seek a direct indictment for these offenses in circuit court. Thus, the number of juveniles transferred to circuit court may increase.

Circuit court judges can employ a number of sentencing options that are not available to juvenile court judges, including incarceration in adult prison and jail facilities. Moreover, mandatory minimum penalties apply to juveniles convicted in circuit court and, if a charge carries a mandatory minimum term, the circuit court judge must impose the mandatory time. Additionally, per § 16.1-271, juveniles who are convicted as adults in circuit court must be treated as adults for subsequent criminal acts and in any allegations of delinquency that are pending in juvenile court at the time of the circuit court conviction.

By increasing the number of individuals who are eligible to receive an adult prison sentence, the proposed legislation may increase the future state-responsible (prison) bed space needs of the Commonwealth. The number of additional juveniles who may be convicted in circuit court in the future, however, is unknown. Therefore, the impact cannot be determined.

Local adult correctional facilities. The proposal could also increase local-responsible (jail) bed space needs; however, the size of the impact cannot be determined.

Adult community corrections programs. Because the proposal could result in circuit court convictions and subsequent supervision requirements for an additional number of juveniles, the proposal may increase the need for adult community corrections resources. Since the number of cases cannot be estimated, the potential impact on community corrections resources cannot be determined.

² A juvenile was identified as having a previous adjudication for one of the specified offenses if he or she had a prior guilty adjudication, probation placement, post-detention placement, or commitment to DJJ for one of those crimes.

Virginia’s sentencing guidelines. The sentencing guidelines cover nearly all felony convictions in circuit court. By statute, the guidelines apply in cases of juveniles tried and convicted in circuit court. No adjustment to the guidelines would be necessary under the proposal.

Juvenile correctional centers. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the impact of the proposal on juvenile correctional center (JCC) bed space needs cannot be determined; however, any impact is expected to be small.

Juvenile detention facilities. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the effect of the proposal on the bed space needs of juvenile detention facilities cannot be determined; however, any impact is expected to be small.

Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4, the estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 890 of the 2011 Acts of Assembly requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of \$50,000.

Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4, the estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of commitment to the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice.

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