



Fiscal Impact Statement for Proposed Legislation

Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission

House Bill No. 794 (Patron – Leftwich)

LD #: 16101718

Date: 12/31/2015

Topic: Punishment for Class 1 felony offenses

Fiscal Impact Summary:

- **State Adult Correctional Facilities:**
\$50,000 *
- **Local Adult Correctional Facilities:**
None (\$0)
- **Adult Community Corrections Programs:**
None (\$0)

- **Juvenile Correctional Centers:**
None (\$0)**
- **Juvenile Detention Facilities:**
None (\$0)**

** Provided by the Department of Juvenile Justice

* The estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 665 of the 2015 Acts of Assembly requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of \$50,000.

Summary of Proposed Legislation:

The proposal adds § 19.2-264.3:1.4 to eliminate the death penalty for defendants charged with capital offenses who were determined by a judge or jury to have had a severe mental illness at the time the crime was committed; in such cases, the defendant would be sentenced to life imprisonment. The proposal defines severe mental illness and specifies procedures for conducting mental health evaluations of defendants charged with capital offenses and introducing such evidence at trial.

Currently, under § 18.2-10, an offender convicted of a Class 1 felony who was at least 18 years of age at the time of the offense and is determined not to be mentally retarded may be sentenced to either death or life imprisonment. For individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offense or who are mentally retarded, the penalty is life imprisonment.

Analysis:

According to the Department of Corrections (DOC), there were seven Virginia inmates serving under a death sentence as of November 24, 2015. No new offenders have entered death row since October 2011.

DOC data indicate that inmates remain on death row for an average of 5.8 years prior to execution (based on the last 30 inmates executed). However, individuals currently on death row have served between 4.4 years and 15.5 years (as of November 24, 2015). As of December 2, 2015, no execution dates were set for current death row inmates.

Existing data do not contain sufficient detail to identify the number of defendants who may be affected by the proposal.

Impact of Proposed Legislation:

State adult correctional facilities. By removing the applicability of the death penalty in cases where the offender is determined to have a severe mental illness, the proposed legislation may increase the state-responsible (prison) bed space needs of the Commonwealth. However, existing data do not provide sufficient detail to estimate the number of individuals who would be sentenced to a term of life imprisonment instead of death if the proposal is enacted. While the impact on prison bed space needs cannot be determined, any impact is likely to be small.

Local adult correctional facilities. The proposal will not affect local-responsible (jail) bed space needs.

Adult community corrections programs. The proposal will not affect adult community corrections programs.

Virginia's sentencing guidelines. Virginia's sentencing guidelines do not cover completed acts of capital murder. Attempted capital offenses are covered by the guidelines when there is an accompanying conviction for a crime with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment; in those situations, the attempted capital murder is an additional offense that augments the guidelines recommendation. No adjustment to the guidelines would be necessary under the proposal.

Juvenile correctional centers. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the proposal will not increase juvenile correctional center (JCC) bed space needs.

Juvenile detention facilities. The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) reports that the proposal will not increase the bed space needs of juvenile detention facilities.

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 665 of the 2015 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 is \$0 for periods of commitment to the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice.

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