



Fiscal Impact Statement for Proposed Legislation

Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission

Senate Bill No. 1218

(Patron – Stanley)

LD #: 17103743

Date: 1/16/2017

Topic: Cruelty to animals

Fiscal Impact Summary:

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

- **Juvenile Direct Care:**
Cannot be determined**
- **Juvenile Detention Facilities:**
Cannot be determined**

**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 780 of the 2016 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 § 3.2-6570 of the *Code of Virginia* to establish a Class 2 misdemeanor for killing, in any manner not otherwise prohibited under § 3.2-6570, a dog or cat that is a companion animal unless the animal is in extreme physical distress or poses an immediate threat of serious harm to a person. Any subsequent violation would be a Class 6 felony. The proposal also exempts certain individuals who euthanize a companion animal.

Currently, felony violations under § 3.2-6570 include torturing or mutilating a dog or cat causing death, a second or subsequent conviction involving cruelty to animals in which at least one act resulted in death, or a second or subsequent conviction involving the killing of a dog or cat for hide, fur or pelt. Crimes punishable as Class 1 misdemeanors under § 3.2-6570 include depriving any animal of necessary food, drink, shelter, or emergency veterinary treatment, willfully engaging in an act of cruelty to any animal, and soring any equine for any purpose.

Analysis:

According to the Circuit Court Case Management System (CMS) for fiscal year (FY) 2015 and FY2016, 27 offenders were convicted of a Class 6 felony under § 3.2-6570 for cruelty to animals. The animal cruelty conviction was the primary, or most serious, offense in 20 of the cases. Slightly less than half (45%) of these offenders received a local-responsible (jail) term with a median sentence of three months. One-third (35%) did not receive an active term of incarceration to serve after sentencing. The remaining four offenders (20%) received a state-responsible (prison) term with a median sentence of 1.75 years.

General District Court CMS data for FY2015 and FY2016 indicate that 394 offenders were convicted of a misdemeanor under § 3.2-6570 for animal cruelty. The majority, 79.2%, of these offenders did not receive an active term of incarceration to serve after sentencing. The median sentence for the 20.8% who were sentenced to a local-responsible (jail) term was one month.

Impact of Proposed Legislation:

State adult correctional facilities. Because it creates a new Class 6 felony offense, which is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, the proposal may increase the future state-responsible (prison) bed space needs of the Commonwealth. However, existing data do not provide sufficient detail to estimate the number of new felony convictions that could result from enactment of the proposal. Therefore, the impact on prison bed space needs cannot be determined.

Local adult correctional facilities. Similarly, the proposal may increase the local-responsible (jail) bed space needs, but the magnitude of the impact cannot be determined.

Adult community corrections programs. Because the proposal could result in felony convictions and subsequent supervision requirements for additional offenders, the proposal may increase the need for adult community corrections resources. However, the potential impact on state and local community corrections programs cannot be determined.

Virginia's sentencing guidelines. Felony convictions under § 3.2-6570 are not covered by the sentencing guidelines when these offenses are the primary, or most serious, offense in a case. However, convictions under this statute could augment the guidelines recommendation if the most serious offense at sentencing is covered by the guidelines. No adjustment to the guidelines would be necessary under the proposal.

Juvenile direct care. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice, the impact of the proposal on direct care (juvenile correctional center or alternative commitment placement) bed space needs cannot be determined.

Juvenile detention facilities. The Department of Juvenile Justice reports that the proposal's impact on the bed space needs of juvenile detention facilities cannot be determined.

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 780 of the 2016 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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