

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL NOTE

BILL NUMBER: SB 14
SHORT TITLE: Reclassify Prison Offenses
SPONSOR(S): Senator Jenkins; Miller

FISCAL IMPACT

Yes () No (X) No Estimate Available ()

(in millions)

FY 1997-98 FY 1998-99 FY 1999-00 FY 2000-01 FY 2001-02

GENERAL FUND

Correction

Recurring
Nonrecurring

NO FISCAL IMPACT

Judicial

Recurring
Nonrecurring

TOTAL EXPENDITURES

POSITIONS: It is anticipated that approximately 0 positions would be needed to supervise the additional inmates housed under this bill. This is based on inmate to employee ratios, provided by the Division of Prisons, for close, medium, and minimum custody facilities (These position totals include security, program, and administrative personnel.).

Close – 2 to 1
Medium – 3 to 1
Minimum – 4 to 1

PRINCIPAL DEPARTMENT(S) & PROGRAM(S) AFFECTED: Dept. of Correction; Judicial Branch

EFFECTIVE DATE: December 1, 1997

BILL SUMMARY: This bill increases or changes criminal penalties for escape from prison or local confinement facilities -- escapes of working prisoners from custody would be increased from a Class 3 misdemeanor to a Class 1; escapes from confinement in State prisons would be changed from a Class I felony to a Class I misdemeanor for misdemeanants and from a Class I to Class H for felons; escapes from local confinement facilities would be increased from a Class I to H if the offender was convicted of a felony and pending transfer to a State prison or is serving a sentence for a felony. In essence, the bill allows the judges in each instance to sentence inmates to additional prison time..

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY: Department of Correction

The following chart shows, for the end of each fiscal year, beds projected to be available, the number of inmates projected under the present Structured Sentencing Act, the deficit or surplus beds, the number of additional inmates projected to be incarcerated under this bill, and the additional beds needed as a result of this bill after considering projected prison capacity: (The following information is specific to each individual bill.)

	<u>June 30</u> <u>1998</u>	<u>June 30</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>June 30</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>June 30</u> <u>2001</u>	<u>June 30</u> <u>2002</u>
Projected No. of Inmates Under Current Structured Sentencing Act ¹	31,762	30,371	30,060	30,610	31,259
Projected No. of Prison Beds (DOC Expanded Capacity) ²	34,133	35,599	35,599	35,599	35,599
No. of Beds Over/Under No. of Inmates Under Current Structured Sentencing Act	+2,371	+5,228	+5,539	+4,989	+4,430
No. of Projected Additional Inmates Due to this Bill	0	27	30	32	31
No. of Additional Beds Need Each Fiscal Year Due to this Bill	0	0	0	0	0

¹ The Sentencing Commission's revised prison population projections (dated December 1996) were estimated under three scenarios: High, Best, and Low. The differences in these scenarios reflect varying assumptions on incarceration rates under Structured Sentencing, probation and revocation rates, and the decline of the stock population. The projections outlined above are included in the "Best scenario" since the Sentencing Commission and the Department of Correction believe this scenario is most likely to occur.

² Projected number of prison beds based on Department of Correction estimates of expanded bed capacity as of 1/11/97. These numbers do not include the number of beds requested in the Governor's 1997-99 Capital Improvement budget.

As shown in bold in the table above, the Sentencing Commission estimates this specific legislation will add 31 inmates to the prison system by 2001-02. There is no additional fiscal impact resulting from the passage of this bill because these additional beds and their associated costs can be absorbed within the Department of Correction's existing budget. This analysis is based on the following assumptions and methodology:

1. There will be an estimated surplus of 4,430 beds by FY 2001-02, based on current prison population projections by the Sentencing Commission and the estimated expanded prison bed capacity (see table above);
2. The expanded prison capacity includes all beds available when currently funded prison construction is completed, as well operating funds for food, clothing, health, and security of prisoners as the units begin housing inmates;
3. The Department of Correction will continue operating most dormitory units at 130% of capacity, as allowed by court consent decrees; and,
4. The expanded prison capacity numbers do not include out-of-state beds, jail contract beds, or the 2,000 net new beds which would be established if the projects receiving planning and design funds in the 1996 Session were fully funded.

Note: The number of additional inmates projected to be incarcerated if the 17 Sentencing Commission recommendations are approved by the 1997 General Assembly is 2,044 inmates by FY 2001-02 and 2,944 inmates by FY 2006-07. If all of the Sentencing Commission recommendations are approved, the estimated surplus of prison beds will be 2,296 by the end of FY 2001-02. These recommendations, along with other criminal penalty bill enhancements, reduce the availability of prison beds in future years. The Fiscal Research Division is monitoring the cumulative effect of all criminal penalty bills on the prison system. Funds for the close custody beds are budgeted 3 years in advance, while funds for the medium and minimum custody beds are budgeted 2 years in advance, to allow adequate time for planning and construction.

JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY: The Judicial Branch indicates that increasing criminal penalties could result in more vigorous litigation and thus more court time and cost. However, it is anticipated that the number of cases will be small enough to be absorbed statewide.

SOURCES OF DATA: Department of Correction, Judicial Branch; North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission

FISCAL RESEARCH DIVISION

733-4910

PREPARED BY: Jim Mills

APPROVED BY: Tom L. Covington Tom C

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