



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

SB 20-191

FISCAL NOTE

Drafting Number: LLS 20-0425 Date: March 12, 2020
Prime Sponsors: Sen. Lee Bill Status: Senate Judiciary
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Bill Topic: CHANGES TO FELONY MURDER

- Summary of Fiscal Impact: State Revenue, State Expenditure, State Transfer, TABOR Refund, Local Government, Statutory Public Entity

The bill changes the crime classification for certain felony offenses that result in the death of a person from a class 1 felony to a class 2 felony, among other provisions. It may increase state revenue beginning in FY 2020-21 and reduce state expenditures beginning in FY 2036-37.

Appropriation Summary: No appropriation is required.

Fiscal Note Status: The fiscal note reflects the introduced bill.

Summary of Legislation

Under current law, a person who acts alone or with one or more persons to commit or attempt to commit felony arson, robbery, burglary, kidnapping, specific crimes of sexual assault, or escape that results in the death of a person, other than a participant, caused by any participant in the crime can be convicted of first degree murder subject to a class 1 felony.

The bill changes the penalty for this crime to a class 2 felony and makes the following changes:

- requires the death be caused by a participant;
repeals certain elements of the affirmative defense;
clarifies that a court must sentence a defendant to a definite sentence within the aggravated range when the court finds certain aggravating circumstances; and
provides that a defendant is subject to a mandatory sentence as a crime of violence if the fact finder makes specific findings related to use or threat of deadly weapons; threat, intimidation, and force; or causation of serious bodily injury.

Comparable Crime Analysis

Legislative Council Staff is required to include certain information in the fiscal note for any bill that creates a new crime, changes the classification of an existing crime, or changes an element of an existing crime. This section outlines data on the existing crime affected by this bill.

Prior conviction data. This bill changes the classification of an existing class 1 felony for first degree murder related to felony arson, robbery, burglary, kidnapping, specific crimes of sexual assault, and escape to a class 2 felony. From FY 2016-17 to FY 2018-19, 35 individuals have been convicted and sentenced for this existing offense. Of the persons convicted, all were male. Demographically, 19 were White, 10 were Black/African American, 3 were Hispanic, 0 were Asian, 1 was American Indian, and 2 did not have a race identified.

Penalties and average length of stay. Under current law, the penalty for a class 1 felony is a sentence of life imprisonment or death with no fine penalty and no parole, while the penalty for a class 2 felony crime of violence is a sentence of 16 to 48 years of imprisonment, a fine between \$5,000 and \$1 million, and a mandatory parole period of five years. The current average length of stay in prison for a class 1 felony is 40 years, while the current average length of stay in prison for a class 2 felony crime of violence is 16.8 years.

State Revenue

Beginning in FY 2020-21, this bill may increase state cash fund revenue in the Judicial Department. By changing the penalty for a specific first degree felony murder charge from a class 1 felony with no fines to a class 2 felony, some offenders could be assessed a fine of up to \$1 million. Because the courts have the discretion of imposing a fine, the precise impact to state revenue cannot be determined. However, because fines are rarely imposed for a class 2 felony, the fiscal note assumes that any revenue generated is likely to be minimal. The fiscal note similarly assumes a minimal change for any court and administrative fees. This revenue is subject to TABOR.

State Expenditures

Beginning in FY 2020-21, the bill may increase workload in the Judicial Department and in agencies representing indigent persons. Beginning in FY 2036-37, the bill will reduce costs in the Department of Correction (DOC).

Judicial Department. The bill is not expected to impact trial court caseload, but may impact the amount of time it takes to prosecute a case. Costs and workload may also increase in the agencies that provide representation to indigent persons, including the Office of the State Public Defender and the Office of Alternate Defense Council. Because the number of overall cases impacted by the bill is expected to be minimal, it is assumed that this workload can be accomplished within existing appropriations. Should a change in funding be required for any agency or division with the Judicial Department, the fiscal note assumes it will be addressed through the annual budget process.

Department of Corrections. Beginning no earlier than FY 2036-37, this bill will reduce state General Fund costs in the Department of Corrections. As discussed in the Comparable Crime Analysis section above, this assumes offenders convicted of the specific felony murder in the bill after September 1, 2020, will serve the current average length of stay for a class 2 felony crime of violence, which is 16.8 years in prison. As of this writing, it is not known what the annual cost for a prison bed will be that far into the future or if the current rate of convictions will continue. For informational purposes, the current cost of incarceration in a state prison is about \$42,665 per offender, per year. Offenders leaving prison will be required to participate in parole for at least five years. The current cost for parole is about \$5,862 per year, per offender. The fiscal note assumes the reduction in appropriations resulting from the bill will be addressed through the annual budget process.

TABOR refunds. The bill may minimally increase state General Fund obligations for TABOR refunds beginning in FY 2020-21. Under current law and the December 2019 Legislative Council Staff forecast, the bill will correspondingly increase the amount refunded to taxpayers via sales tax refunds made available on income tax returns for tax years 2021 and 2022, respectively. A forecast of state revenue subject to TABOR is not available beyond FY 2021-22.

Local Government Impact

Similar to the state, district attorney workload may be minimally impacted. District attorney offices are funded by counties, with each county in a judicial district contributing based on its population.

Effective Date

The bill takes effect September 1, 2020, if no referendum petition is filed, and applies to offenses committed on or after this date.

State and Local Government Contacts

Corrections
Information Technology

Counties
Judicial

District Attorneys
Law