



Ohio Legislative Service Commission

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Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

Bill: S.B. 237 of the 131st G.A.

Date: April 13, 2016

Status: As Introduced

Sponsor: Sen. LaRose

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

Contents: "Bulk amount" of fentanyl and permitting drug abuse penalty

State Fiscal Highlights

- The bill's changes to the "bulk amount" of fentanyl may increase both the number of felony offenders being sentenced to prison and the prison terms for offenders that would otherwise have been prison-bound under current law. The magnitude of the additional annual incarceration costs for the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction are uncertain, as the number of affected offenders and the associated lengths of stay are unknown.
- The bill's permitting drug abuse penalty change may elevate certain misdemeanors to felonies, which could generate minimal additional annual state court cost revenue that is distributed between the Indigent Defense Support Fund (Fund 5DY0) and the Victims of Crime/Reparations Fund (Fund 4020).

Local Fiscal Highlights

- The bill's permitting drug abuse penalty change will likely elevate certain misdemeanors to felonies, resulting in a potential savings effect on municipal criminal justice system operating costs and revenues and a potential increase in county criminal justice system operating costs and revenues.
- The bill's changes to the "bulk amount" of fentanyl is not likely to increase the number of felony drug offense cases processed by county criminal justice systems and their associated costs, but will more likely change the charge(s) and elevate the associated penalty or penalties. There could also be a savings effect if offenders are sentenced to a prison term rather than being sanctioned locally with county money covering incarceration and community supervision costs.

Detailed Fiscal Analysis

The substantively notable fiscal effects of the bill will come from (1) reducing the minimum amount of fentanyl and fentanyl mixtures which constitute a bulk amount for criminal sentencing purposes for both possession and trafficking, and (2) increasing, under certain circumstances, the penalty for permitting drug abuse from a first degree misdemeanor to a fifth degree felony.

Bulk amount of fentanyl

Current penalties for fentanyl-related drug offenses start at a felony of the fifth degree (possession) or a felony of the fourth degree (trafficking). In the case of both possession and trafficking, the penalty increases, up to a first degree felony, based on the amount of the drug involved in the offense. Any amount less than the amount defined as "bulk" by law results in the offender being charged with the lowest level felony – fifth degree for possession and fourth degree for trafficking.

The National Forensic Laboratory Information System¹ reports that there were 1,245 fentanyl seizures in Ohio in calendar year 2014, and that there was an increase of 259% in reports of fentanyl being submitted for testing from the second half of 2013 to the first half of 2014 nationwide. This suggests that there could be a notable number of criminal cases in Ohio affected by the bill's "bulk amount" provisions.

The bill elevation of the penalty for these offenses is likely to increase the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's annual incarceration costs. The magnitude of the additional annual incarceration costs for DRC are uncertain, as the number of affected offenders and the associated lengths of stay are unknown.

DRC's annual incarceration cost increase will be a function of two groups of offenders as follows:

(1) Offenders that under current law and practice would have been sanctioned locally, with the county paying the related incarceration and community supervision costs, and under the bill will be sentenced to a term in prison; and

(2) Offenders that under current law and practice would have received a prison sentence, but under the bill are likely to have a longer prison term imposed.

Table 1 below shows the average time served for drug felonies of the fourth and fifth degree, 1.2 years and 0.7 years, respectively. Under the bill, certain drug offenders may be more likely to be convicted of a felony of the first, second, or third degree rather than lesser felony offenses of the fourth and fifth degree. The table shows the resulting potential increase in time served, based on the average time served for drug offenses of

¹ The National Forensic Laboratory Information System is a program of the Drug Enforcement Administration that collects drug identification results from drug cases submitted to and analyzed by federal, state, and local forensic laboratories.

the first, second, and third degree. Generally, the increase in time served potentially ranges from roughly 1 to 5 years per offender.

Trafficking			Possession		
Felony Level	Average Time Served	Potential Time Served Increase under the Bill	Felony Level	Average Time Served	Potential Time Served Increase under the Bill
F4	1.2	N/A	F5	0.7	N/A
F3	2.0	0.8	F3	2.0	1.3
F2	3.5	2.3	F2	3.5	2.8
F1	5.8	4.6	F1	5.8	5.1

The "bulk amount" provisions appear unlikely to generate any additional costs for county criminal justice systems, as the more likely outcome is not the filing of more criminal cases, but changes in how certain drug offenders are charged and sentenced subsequent to their conviction. It is also possible that there could be a savings effect if offenders are sentenced to a prison term rather than being sanctioned locally with county money covering incarceration and community supervision costs.

Permitting drug abuse penalty

The bill enhances the penalty for the offense of permitting drug abuse in cases based upon the illegal manufacture of drugs, illegal cultivation of marijuana, or illegal assembly or possession of chemicals for the manufacture of drugs. Under current law, the offense of permitting drug abuse in these cases is a first degree misdemeanor. Under the bill, the offense of permitting drug abuse in these cases is a fifth degree felony.

Available data suggests that the number of permitting drug abuse cases statewide ranges roughly 200 to 400 per year, and that the number of such cases in any given local jurisdiction will be relatively small in the context of that jurisdiction's overall criminal caseload. For example, the Franklin County Municipal Court reported the filing of 17 permitting drug abuse-related charges for calendar year 2014.

The bill's penalty enhancement provision will affect local expenditures on certain criminal cases in two ways. It will shift criminal cases that would have been handled by municipal courts and county courts as misdemeanors under existing law to courts of common pleas where they will be handled as felonies and offenders could be subjected to more serious sanctions. As a result, municipalities may save some of their annual criminal justice system expenditures related to investigating, adjudicating, prosecuting, defending (if indigent), and sanctioning offenders who commit these offenses. Conversely, counties could experience an increase in their annual criminal justice system expenditures, as felonies are typically more time-consuming and expensive to resolve and the local sanctioning costs can be higher as well. Table 2 below summarizes the sentencing and fines for a misdemeanor of the first degree and a felony of the fifth degree.

Table 2. Sentences and Fines for Certain Criminal Offenses Generally		
Offense Level	Possible Fine	Possible Term of Incarceration
1st Degree Misdemeanor	Up to \$1,000	Not more than 180 days in jail
5th Degree Felony	Up to \$2,500	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12 months definite prison term

Given the number of criminal cases that will be affected by the bill's penalty enhancement appears to be relatively small, any potential decrease in annual municipal criminal justice system expenditures and any potential increase in annual county criminal justice system expenditures would likely be no more than minimal.

As the penalty enhancement would shift certain cases out of county courts and municipal courts (which handle misdemeanors) and into courts of common pleas (which handle felonies), this creates a potential loss of court cost, fee, and fine revenue for municipalities. Conversely, it creates the possibility that counties may gain court cost, fee, and fine revenue. As the number of affected criminal cases appears likely to be relatively small, the amount of annual court cost and fine revenue that municipalities might lose and counties might gain would be no more than minimal.

The bill's penalty enhancement may lead to a minimal annual gain for the state in the amount of locally collected court cost revenue that would be divided between the Indigent Defense Support Fund (Fund 5DY0) and the Victims of Crime/Reparations Fund (Fund 4020). This is because the total amount of state court costs imposed on an offender and deposited to the credit of Fund 5DY0 and Fund 4020 is higher for a felony (\$60) than it is for a misdemeanor (\$29).