

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 45

(Senators Bromwell and DeGrange)

Judicial Proceedings

Judiciary

**Criminal Law - Forgery of Controlled Dangerous Substance Prescriptions or
Orders - Penalty**

This bill makes it a felony to obtain or attempt to obtain a controlled dangerous substance, or procure or attempt to procure the administration of a controlled dangerous substance, by counterfeiting or altering a prescription or a written order from an authorized health provider. Applicable maximum penalties are imprisonment for ten years or a \$1,000 fine for each forgery, or both.

The bill clarifies that applicable penalties for this offense are not altered if the violation involves the use or possession of marijuana. The bill also provides that the District Court has concurrent jurisdiction with a circuit court in cases involving obtaining or procuring a controlled dangerous substance by counterfeiting or altering a prescription or written order.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues and expenditures due to the bill's penalty provision.

Local Effect: Potential minimal increase in revenues and expenditures due to the bill's penalty provision.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: It is unlawful for any person to possess or administer to another any controlled dangerous substance unless it was obtained pursuant to a prescription or order from an authorized provider acting in the course of professional practice. It is also unlawful to obtain or attempt to obtain a controlled dangerous substance, or procure or attempt to procure the administration of any controlled dangerous substance, through fraud, deceit or subterfuge, forgery or alteration of a prescription, concealment of material facts, the use of false identifying information, or misrepresentation.

Upon conviction, a person is guilty of a misdemeanor and may be sentenced to a term of imprisonment not exceeding four years, a fine not exceeding \$25,000, or both. However, a person whose violation involved the use or possession of marijuana is subject to imprisonment for up to one year, a fine not to exceed \$1,000, or both.

Background: According to the Office of the Attorney General, acquisition of controlled dangerous substances through prescription forgery or fraud have been encountered in cases involving Medicaid fraud. Fraudulent or forged prescriptions are written for drugs such as percocet, oxycontin, percodan, other painkillers and depressants. Anne Arundel, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties have active drug diversion investigation units that devote resources to prescription forgery. The federal Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Unit in Maryland reports that a majority of the 52 major cases opened for investigation in 2001 involve prescription forgery.

State Revenues: General fund revenues could increase minimally as a result of the bill's monetary penalty provision from cases heard in the District Court.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures could increase minimally as a result of the bill's incarceration penalty due to more people being committed to Division of Correction (DOC) facilities for longer periods of time and increased payments to counties for reimbursement of inmate costs. The number of people convicted under the proposed enhanced penalties in the bill is expected to be minimal. DOC advises that in fiscal 2001, the Division of Parole and Probation processed 61 people who were convicted for forging prescriptions and 101 people who were convicted of obtaining prescriptions through fraudulent means.

Persons serving a sentence longer than one year are incarcerated in DOC facilities. Currently, the average total cost per inmate, including overhead, is estimated at \$1,850 per month. This bill alone, however, should not create the need for additional beds, personnel or facilities. Excluding overhead, the average cost of housing a new DOC inmate (including medical care and variable costs) is \$300 per month.

Persons serving a sentence of one year or less in a jurisdiction other than Baltimore City are sentenced to local detention facilities. The State reimburses counties for part of their incarceration costs, on a per diem basis, after a person has served 90 days. State per diem reimbursements for fiscal 2003 are estimated to range from \$10 to \$61 per inmate, depending upon jurisdiction. Persons sentenced to such a term in Baltimore City are generally incarcerated in DOC facilities. The Baltimore City Detention Center, a State-operated facility, is used primarily for pretrial detentions.

Local Revenues: Revenues could increase minimally as a result of the bill's monetary penalty provision from cases heard in the circuit courts.

Local Expenditures: Expenditures could increase minimally as a result of the bill's proposed enhanced incarceration penalty. Counties pay the full cost of incarceration for people in their facilities for the first 90 days of the sentence, plus part of the per diem cost after 90 days. Per diem operating costs of local detention facilities are expected to range from \$20 to \$84 per inmate in fiscal 2003.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Office of the Attorney General, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, *Maryland Daily Record*, Department of State Police, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 28, 2002
mld/cer Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 22, 2002

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