

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 553

(Senator Haines, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

Criminal Law - Use of a Firearm in the Commission of a Crime of Violence or a
Felony

This bill makes it a misdemeanor to use any firearm, rather than any handgun or antique firearm capable of being concealed on the person, in the commission of a crime of violence or a felony, whether or not the firearm is operable at the time of the crime.

“Firearm” is defined as a weapon that expels, is designed to expel, or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive, or the frame or receiver of such a weapon. Firearm includes an antique firearm, handgun, rifle, shotgun, short-barreled rifle, short-barreled shotgun, starter gun, or any other firearm, whether loaded or unloaded.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Minimal increase in general fund expenditures due to the bill’s expanded application of the crime of use of a firearm in the commission of a crime and its attendant mandatory minimum sentence. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A person may not use an antique firearm capable of being concealed on the person or any handgun in the commission of a crime of violence or any felony, whether the antique firearm or handgun is operable or inoperable at the time of the crime.

A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and, in addition to any other penalty imposed for the crime of violence or felony, must be sentenced to imprisonment for not less than 5 years and not exceeding 20 years. Except for provisions governing release from the Patuxent Institution, the person is not eligible for parole in less than five years.

“Antique firearm” means: (1) a firearm, including a firearm with a matchlock, flintlock, percussion cap, or similar ignition system, manufactured before 1899; or (2) a replica of such a firearm that is not designed or redesigned to use rimfire or conventional centerfire fixed ammunition, or uses rimfire or conventional centerfire fixed ammunition that is no longer manufactured in the U.S. and is not readily available in the ordinary channels of commercial trade.

“Handgun” means a pistol, revolver, or other firearm capable of being concealed on the person. Handgun includes a short-barreled shotgun and a short-barreled rifle. Handgun does not include a shotgun, rifle, or antique firearm.

State Expenditures: In fiscal 2004, the Division of Correction (DOC) had an intake of 460 persons with a handgun violation and, for 125 of those persons, the handgun violation was the most serious offense. The average time served for the 125 persons is expected to be 53 months. However, the extent to which this bill’s changes may increase firearm prosecutions and DOC’s annual intake is unknown for two reasons: (1) prosecutors have wide discretion to actually bring charges for specific statutory offenses; and (2) actual prosecutions by the U.S. Attorney in federal court for gun cases arising in Baltimore City and Prince George’s County, sending convicted persons to federal prisons, may significantly reduce State and local costs associated with such offenses.

General fund expenditures could increase minimally as a result of the bill’s expanded application of the crime of use of a firearm in the commission of a crime due to more people being committed to DOC facilities for mandatory minimum sentences. The additional number of people sentenced under these provisions is expected to be minimal.

Persons serving a sentence longer than 18 months 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 \$310 per month. Excluding medical care, the average variable costs total \$120 per month.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Similar bills were introduced in 2003 and 2004. SB 323 of 2003 and SB 318 of 2004 each received a hearing before the Judicial Proceedings Committee and had no further action taken on them.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Department of Legislative Services

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