

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2011 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 845  
Judiciary

(Delegates Stein and Hubbard)

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Criminal Law - Controlled Dangerous Substances - Mephedrone

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This bill designates mephedrone and several similar chemical compounds as Schedule I controlled dangerous substances.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues and expenditures due to applicable controlled dangerous substances penalty provisions. Potential minimal increase in general fund expenditures for the Office of the Public Defender to accommodate any increase in cases as a result of the bill. Any increase in caseloads for Offices of State's Attorneys and the District Court can be handled with existing resources.

**Local Effect:** Potential minimal increase in local revenues and expenditures due to applicable controlled dangerous substances penalty provisions. Any increase in circuit court caseloads can be handled with existing resources.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential minimal loss of revenue for small businesses that currently sell substances that become illegal under the bill.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The bill adds a material, compound, mixture, or preparation that contains any of the following hallucinogenic or hallucinogenic-like substances to the list of Schedule I controlled dangerous substances:

- 3,4-methylenedioxymethcathinone (methyldone);

- 3,4-methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV);
- 4-methylmethcathinone (mephedrone);
- 4-methoxymethcathinone (methedrone);
- 4-fluoromethcathinone (flephephone); and
- 3-fluoromethcathinone (3-FMC).

A salt, isomer, or salt of an isomer of any of these substances is also a Schedule I controlled dangerous substance if the existence of the salt, isomer, or salt of an isomer is possible within the specific chemical designation.

**Current Law:** Controlled dangerous substances are listed on one of five schedules (Schedules I through V) set forth in statute depending on their potential for abuse and acceptance for medical use. Under the federal Controlled Dangerous Substances Act, for a drug or substance to be classified as Schedule I, the following findings must be made: (1) the substance has a high potential for abuse; (2) the drug or other substance has no currently accepted medical use in the United States; and (3) there is a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision.

No distinction is made in the law regarding the illegal possession of any controlled dangerous substance, regardless of which schedule it is on, with the exception of marijuana. When the substance is marijuana, the defendant is guilty of a misdemeanor and the maximum criminal penalties for a violation are one year imprisonment and/or a \$1,000 fine. If the court finds that the defendant used or possessed marijuana out of medical necessity, the maximum punishment is a \$100 fine. The use or possession of any other controlled dangerous substance is a misdemeanor with maximum criminal penalties of four years imprisonment and/or a \$25,000 fine.

For specified primary crimes involving controlled dangerous substances and paraphernalia, a person may not:

- distribute, dispense, or possess with the intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance;
- manufacture a controlled dangerous substance or manufacture, distribute, or possess a machine, equipment, or device that is adapted to produce a controlled dangerous substance with the intent to use it to produce, sell, or dispense a controlled dangerous substance;
- create, distribute, or possess with the intent to distribute a counterfeit substance;
- manufacture, distribute, or possess equipment designed to render a counterfeit substance;

- keep a common nuisance (any place resorted to for the purpose of illegally administering controlled dangerous substances or where such substances or controlled paraphernalia are illegally manufactured, distributed, dispensed, stored, or concealed); or
- pass, issue, make, or possess a false, counterfeit, or altered prescription for a controlled dangerous substance with the intent to distribute the controlled dangerous substance.

A violator is guilty of a felony and subject to maximum penalties of imprisonment for five years and/or a fine of \$15,000. A subsequent offender under these prohibitions is subject to a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of two years imprisonment.

When the controlled dangerous substance is a Schedule I or Schedule II narcotic drug, a convicted person is subject to maximum penalties of imprisonment for 20 years and/or a fine of \$25,000. A second-time offender or conspirator, even if the prior conviction was under federal law or in another state, must receive a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and is subject to a maximum fine of \$100,000. The mandatory minimum sentence is nonsuspendable and nonparolable.

A third-time offender or conspirator who is convicted again of those same primary crimes involving a Schedule I or Schedule II narcotic drug and meets certain confinement and conviction prerequisites, is subject to a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of 25 years and a maximum fine of \$100,000. A fourth-time offender or conspirator with three or more prior separate convictions for such offenses is subject to a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of 40 years and a maximum fine of \$100,000.

When the controlled dangerous substance is specified other drugs – including PCP, LSD, and MDMA – a convicted person is subject to maximum penalties of imprisonment for 20 years and/or a fine of \$20,000. A repeat offender or conspirator, even if the prior conviction was under federal law or in another state, must receive a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and is subject to a maximum fine of \$100,000. The mandatory minimum sentence is nonsuspendable and nonparolable.

A second-time offender or conspirator convicted again of those same primary crimes involving the specified other drugs, if certain confinement and conviction prerequisites are met, is subject to a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of 25 years and a maximum fine of \$100,000. A convicted offender or a conspirator with three or more prior separate convictions for such offenses is subject to a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of 40 years and a maximum fine of \$100,000.

A volume dealer, as defined by the amount of specified substances, is subject to a maximum fine of \$100,000 and a mandatory minimum nonsuspendable, nonparolable sentence of five years. (*See* Criminal Law Article §§ 5-602 through 5-605, 5-607 through 5-609, and 5-612.)

Federal policy dictates that a physician who prescribes Schedule I drugs to a patient may lose his or her federal license to prescribe drugs and be prosecuted. In Maryland, an authorized provider may conduct research in the State with a controlled dangerous substance listed in Schedule I if the authorized provider is registered under federal law to conduct research with a Schedule I substance and gives evidence of the registration to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

**Background:** Mephedrone and MDPV are synthetic psychoactive stimulants that can produce side effects such as increased blood pressure, delusions, paranoia, and psychosis. The substances are sold in powder and tablet form and are chemically similar to compounds found in the khat plant in eastern Africa. They have amphetamine-like qualities, and users often report experiencing effects similar to cocaine, ecstasy, and methamphetamines. Mephedrone and MDPV are available in convenience stores, gas stations, and online for \$25-\$50 per 50-milligram packet. They are often marketed as bath salts, and have street names like “Zoom 2,” “Aura,” “Cloud Nine,” and “meow meow.”

According to news reports, in December 2010, the European Union banned mephedrone, citing its link to at least two deaths. Mephedrone and/or MDPV are also banned in Australia, Israel, and Canada, where it is a Schedule III controlled substance. Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and North Dakota are among the states that have already enacted recent bans, with legislation pending in other states.

While mephedrone and MDPV have not been banned by the Drug Enforcement Administration, they have each been labeled a “drug of concern.” In February 2011, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) issued a nationwide warning about the dangers of synthetic drugs marketed as bath salts. According to ONDCP, the American Association of Poison Control Centers has received over 251 calls this year regarding these substances, compared to 236 calls during all of calendar 2010.

In February 2011, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer of New York announced that he will introduce federal legislation to place mephedrone and MDPV on the list of federally controlled dangerous substances.

**State Revenues:** General fund revenues increase minimally as a result of applicable monetary penalty provisions from cases heard in the District Court.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase minimally for the Office of the Public Defender to handle additional cases generated by the bill. It is assumed that the number of additional arrests and convictions resulting from the bill will be minimal.

General fund expenditures increase minimally as a result of the applicable incarceration penalties due to more people being committed to Division of Correction (DOC) facilities and increased payments to counties for reimbursement of inmate costs. The number of people convicted of controlled dangerous substance offenses as a result of this bill 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 \$2,920 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 variable medical care and variable operating costs) is \$390 per month. Excluding all medical care, the average variable costs total \$170 per month.

Persons serving a sentence of one year or less in a jurisdiction other than Baltimore City are sentenced to local detention facilities. For persons sentenced to a term of between 12 and 18 months, the sentencing judge has the discretion to order that the sentence be served at a local facility or DOC. Prior to fiscal 2010, the State reimbursed counties for part of their incarceration costs, on a per diem basis, after a person has served 90 days. Currently, the State provides assistance to the counties for locally sentenced inmates and for inmates who are sentenced to and awaiting transfer to the State correctional system. A \$45 per diem grant is provided to each county for each day between 12 and 18 months that a sentenced inmate is confined in a local detention center. Counties also receive an additional \$45 per day grant for inmates who have been sentenced to the custody of the DOC but are confined in a local facility. The State does not pay for pretrial detention time in a local correctional facility. Persons incarcerated in Baltimore City are generally incarcerated in DOC facilities. The Baltimore City Detention Center, a State-operated facility, is used primarily for pretrial detentions.

It is assumed that any increase in District Court caseloads as a result of the bill can be handled with existing resources.

**Local Revenues:** Revenues increase minimally as a result of the applicable monetary penalty provisions from cases heard in the circuit courts.

**Local Expenditures:** Expenditures increase minimally as a result of the applicable incarceration penalties. Counties pay the full cost of incarceration for people in their

facilities for the first 12 months of the sentence. A \$45 per diem State grant is provided to each county for each day between 12 and 18 months that a sentenced inmate is confined in a local detention center. Counties also receive an additional \$45 per day grant for inmates who have been sentenced to the custody of DOC but are confined in a local facility. Per diem operating costs of local detention facilities have ranged from \$57 to \$157 per inmate in recent years.

It is assumed that any increase in caseloads for the circuit courts can be handled with existing resources.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None. However, HB 892 (Delegate A. Miller, *et al.* – Judiciary) is identical.

**Information Source(s):** Baltimore City; Kent, Montgomery, Washington, and Worcester counties; Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of State Police; Office of the Public Defender; State's Attorneys' Association; CBC (Canada); Reuters; cbsnews.com; jointogether.org; ABC 32 WNCN TV (Montgomery, Alabama); Office of National Drug Control Policy, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 27, 2011  
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