

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 969 (Delegate George, *et al.*)
Health and Government Operations

**Commission to Consider Mental Health-Related Ways to Limit Mass Violence by
Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorders, Depressive Disorders, or Other
Mental Illness**

This bill establishes – and specifies the composition of – the Commission to Consider Mental Health-Related Ways to Limit Mass Violence by Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorders, Depressive Disorders, or Other Mental Illness. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) is required to provide staff for the commission. The commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 31, 2013.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2013, and terminates May 31, 2014.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by approximately \$50,000 in FY 2014 to reflect the cost of contractual services to assist DHMH in conducting the study for and staffing of the commission. This estimate assumes a one-month implementation delay, during which time commission members are appointed, and that reimbursement costs are absorbable. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The commission is required to:

- hear professional testimony on pertinent topics, including (1) the effects of violent video games on individuals who are socially withdrawn and cognitively involved with the games and (2) warning signs that individuals who are at risk of becoming violent may display;
- create a process for the identification and referral of at-risk mentally ill individuals for risk assessment and treatment by specified professionals;
- create a plan for providing assistance to individuals who may be in early stages of regression, as indicated by specified evidence, and for providing security to those to whom the individuals may have access;
- create a system whereby individuals in schools or colleges who display a negative or “dark” affect can be identified and monitored; and
- consider and study options, as specified by the bill, for establishing an anonymous help line for parents, restricting access by minors and certain mentally ill individuals to violent video games, educating parents on risks associated with the use of violent video games, and encouraging and helping schools to run violence prevention programs.

A member of the commission may not receive compensation as a member of the commission but is entitled to reimbursement for standard expenses, as provided in the State budget.

Current Law/Background: The Mental Hygiene Administration (MHA) is responsible for the treatment and rehabilitation of the mentally ill. MHA plans and develops comprehensive services for the mentally ill; supervises State-run psychiatric facilities for the mentally ill; reviews and approves local plans and budgets for mental health programs; provides consultation to State agencies concerning mental health services; establishes personnel standards; and develops, directs, and assists in the formulation of educational and staff development programs for mental health professionals.

Following the December 2012 school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, MHA posted on its website a number of links to resources for families and schools.

State Expenditures: DHMH advises that contractual services are needed to staff the commission and estimates the total cost of these services to be approximately \$100,000 for a full year in fiscal 2014. Because DHMH lacks expertise on certain areas to be studied under the bill (including the effects, if any, of violent video games), and given

that the commission must report its findings and recommendations seven months after the bill's effective date, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) agrees that contractual services are needed. However, DLS advises that contractual services are likely only needed through December 2013 when the commission must report its findings and recommendations. Thus, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$50,000 in fiscal 2014. This estimate assumes a one-month implementation delay, during which time commission members are appointed.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 8, 2013
ncs/ljm

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