

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1325
Judiciary

(Delegate Buckel, *et al.*)

Crimes of Violence - Parole (Stopping Dangerous and Violent Criminals Act of
2020)

This bill alters the parole eligibility for an inmate sentenced to the Division of Correction (DOC) for a violent crime committed on or after October 1, 2020.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: In the future, general fund expenditures increase for the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) as individuals serve longer sentences under the bill, partially offset by a minimal decrease in expenditures for the Maryland Parole Commission (MPC). Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Offenders sentenced for violent crimes typically are not sentenced to local correctional facilities; therefore, local finances are not anticipated to be materially affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: An inmate sentenced to DOC for a violent crime committed on or after October 1, 2020, is not eligible for parole until the inmate has served the greater of (1) 90% of the inmate's aggregate sentence for violent crimes or (2) one-fourth of the inmate's total aggregate sentence. In addition, an inmate sentenced to more than one term of imprisonment, including a term during which the inmate is eligible for parole and a term during which the inmate is not eligible for parole, is not eligible for parole until the inmate has served the greater of (1) 90% of the inmate's aggregate sentence for violent crimes;

(2) one-fourth of the inmate's total aggregate sentence; or (3) a period equal to the term during which the inmate is not eligible for parole.

Current Law: Parole is a discretionary and conditional release from imprisonment determined after a hearing for an inmate who is eligible to be considered for parole. If parole is granted, the inmate is allowed to serve the remainder of the sentence in the community, subject to the terms and conditions specified in a written parole order.

MPC has jurisdiction regarding parole for eligible inmates sentenced to State correctional facilities and local detention centers. Inmates in the Patuxent Institution who are eligible for parole are under the jurisdiction of the Patuxent Board of Review (PBR).

An inmate sentenced to serve less than six months is not eligible for parole. When an inmate serving a sentence of incarceration of six months or more has served one-fourth of the inmate's sentence, the inmate is entitled to be considered for parole, with several significant exceptions. These exceptions are set forth below.

- An inmate serving a term of incarceration that includes a mandatory minimum sentence that a statute specifies is not subject to parole (*e.g.*, use of a handgun in a felony or crime of violence, subsequent violent offenders with more stringent sentences, and subsequent felony drug offenders with more stringent sentences) and who is not eligible for parole until the inmate served that mandatory minimum sentence. Diminution credits may not be applied toward this minimum requirement.
- Any of the following inmates who do not receive a mandatory minimum sentence are required to serve at least one-half of their sentences for violent crimes before becoming eligible for parole: (1) an inmate convicted of a violent crime committed on or after October 1, 1994; (2) an inmate convicted of child abuse in the first degree committed on or after October 1, 2006; and (3) an inmate convicted of sexual abuse of a child younger than age 13 or a continuing course of conduct with a child committed on or after October 1, 2007.
- Chapter 515 of 2016 (also known as the Justice Reinvestment Act) established that an inmate serving a term of imprisonment for a third or subsequent conviction for specified felony drug offenses committed on or after October 1, 2017, is not eligible for parole until the inmate has served one-half of the aggregate sentence.
- An offender sentenced to life imprisonment must serve a minimum of 15 years less diminution credits before becoming eligible for parole and may be paroled only with approval of the Governor.
- An offender sentenced to life imprisonment for first-degree murder, instead of a sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, must serve a minimum of 25 years less diminution credits before becoming eligible for parole and may generally be paroled only with approval of the Governor. However, if MPC

or PBR decides to grant parole to an inmate who has served 25 years without application of diminution credits and the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services approves the decision, the decision must be transmitted to the Governor, who may disapprove the decision in writing within 180 days. If the Governor does not disapprove the decision to grant parole within that timeframe, the decision to grant parole becomes effective.

- Inmates serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole may not be granted parole unless the Governor commutes the sentence to allow for the possibility of parole or pardons the individual.
- Beginning October 1, 2017, offenders who are age 60 or older and have served at least 15 years of a sentence for a crime of violence may petition for and be granted parole. The provisions do not apply to individuals who are registered or eligible for registration on the sex offender registry.
- Also beginning October 1, 2017, an inmate who is so chronically debilitated or incapacitated by a medical or mental health condition, disease, or syndrome as to be physically incapable of presenting a danger to society may be released on medical parole. If MPC decides to grant medical parole, the decision must be transmitted to the Governor. The Governor is then required to disapprove a recommendation for medical parole within 180 days of the decision by MPC. If the Governor does not disapprove the decision within that timeframe, the decision to grant parole becomes effective.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures for DPSCS increase in the future as individuals serve longer sentences due to the bill's changes. However, MPC advises that an inmate who has served 90% of their sentence would be close to their mandatory release at the time of parole eligibility, thus removing the need for a parole hearing. Thus, the increase in general fund incarceration expenditures may be partially offset by a decrease in general fund expenditures for MPC due to fewer parole hearings.

Under current law, inmates sentenced for violent crimes committed on or after October 1, 1994, are not eligible for parole until after having served the greater of one-half of the inmate's aggregate sentence for violent crimes or one-fourth of the inmate's total aggregate sentence. If the inmate has been sentenced to more than one term of imprisonment, including a term during which the inmate is not eligible for parole, the inmate is also not eligible for parole until the inmate has served a period equal to the term during which the inmate is not eligible for parole. For inmates sentenced to more than one term of imprisonment, including a term during which the inmate is not eligible for parole, there is no change under the bill during the period that the inmate is not eligible for parole.

Persons serving a sentence longer than 18 months are incarcerated in State correctional facilities. Currently, the average total cost per inmate, including overhead, is estimated at \$3,700 per month. Excluding overhead, the average cost of housing a new State inmate (including health care costs) is about \$1,050 per month. Excluding all health care (which is a fixed cost under the current contract), the average variable costs total \$191 per month.

DPSCS advises that inmates serving sentences for violent crimes typically serve 70% of their sentence before release. Therefore, the actual time period for parole eligibility for inmates sentenced for violent crimes increases by approximately 28% under the bill.

DOC advises that in fiscal 2019, there were 5,531 intakes, of which 1,417 were sentenced on one or more violent crimes. In addition, 50 of the intakes were sentenced to life in prison. The average total sentence length of those not sentenced to life in prison was 18 years. *For illustrative purposes only*, for *each* inmate that remains incarcerated for five additional years as a result of the bill, based on the *current* average variable inmate costs of \$191 per month (excluding health care), State incarceration costs increase by \$11,460.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services;
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