

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 633
Judiciary

(Delegate Beitzel)

Gun Theft Felony Act of 2021

This bill (1) excludes theft of a firearm from the general theft statute; (2) classifies theft of a firearm as a separate felony offense; and (3) establishes penalties for theft of a firearm.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal decrease in general fund revenues due to cases shifting from the District Court to the circuit courts, as discussed below. Minimal increase in general fund expenditures due to the bill's incarceration penalties.

Local Effect: Minimal increase in revenues due to the bill's monetary penalties. Minimal decrease in expenditures due to the bill's incarceration penalties.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A person convicted of theft of a firearm, including an antique firearm or a replica of an antique firearm, is guilty of a felony and subject to the following penalties: (1) for a first conviction, a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment and/or a \$1,000 fine; and (2) for a second or subsequent conviction, a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and/or a \$2,500 fine. A sentence imposed for theft of a firearm under the bill must be separate from and consecutive to a sentence imposed for any other offense.

Current Law: Theft of a firearm is subject to the general theft statute that imposes penalties based on the value of the stolen property or services.

Under the general theft statute, a person may not, under specified circumstances, (1) willfully or knowingly obtain or exert unauthorized control over property; (2) obtain control over property by willfully or knowingly using deception; (3) possess stolen property knowing that it has been stolen or believing that it probably has been stolen; (4) obtain control over property knowing that the property was lost, mislaid, or delivered under a mistake as to the identity of the recipient or nature or amount of the property; or (5) obtain the services of another that are available only by compensation by deception or with knowledge that the services are provided without the provider's consent. A violator is required to restore the owner's property or pay the owner the value of the property or services and is subject to the penalties in **Exhibit 1**.

**Exhibit 1
Penalties for Theft**

<u>Value of Property and/or Services</u>	<u>Maximum Penalty</u>
Less than \$100*	Misdemeanor – 90 days imprisonment and/or \$500 fine
At least \$100 but less than \$1,500*	Misdemeanor – 6 months imprisonment and/or \$500 fine (first conviction) or 1 year imprisonment and/or \$500 fine (second or subsequent conviction)
Less than \$1,500 (four or more prior theft convictions)**	Misdemeanor – 5 years imprisonment and/or \$5,000 fine
At least \$1,500 but less than \$25,000	Felony – 5 years imprisonment and/or \$10,000 fine
At least \$25,000 but less than \$100,000	Felony – 10 years imprisonment and/or \$15,000 fine
\$100,000 or more	Felony – 20 years imprisonment and/or \$25,000 fine

*Subject to two-year statute of limitations.

**Subject to specified notice requirements.

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Section 7-110 specifies presumptions and permitted and prohibited defenses to the crime of theft. The District Court has concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts over felony theft violations.

State Fiscal Effect: General fund revenues may decrease minimally from fines imposed in District Court cases that shift to the circuit courts under the bill. General fund expenditures increase minimally as a result of the bill's incarceration penalties due to people being committed to State correctional facilities rather than local facilities as a result of the bill's increased penalty provisions and requirement that a sentence be consecutive to any other. This estimate assumes that the majority of stolen firearms have a value of less than \$1,500.

The Judiciary advises that it does not have information on how many convictions for theft offenses involved the theft of a firearm. However, the number of people convicted of this proposed crime is expected to be minimal.

Changing crimes from misdemeanors to felonies means that (1) such cases are likely to be filed in the circuit courts rather than the District Court and (2) some persons may eventually serve longer incarcerations due to more stringent penalty provisions, applicable to some offenses for prior felony convictions. Accordingly, it is assumed that this bill shifts an unknown number of cases from the District Court to the circuit courts. It is not known whether such a prospective shift may spur more plea bargains and affect actual sentencing practices for this offense.

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 \$3,900 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 a State correctional facility. The State provides assistance to the counties for locally sentenced inmates and for (1) inmates who are sentenced to and awaiting transfer to the State correctional system; (2) sentenced inmates confined in a local detention center between 12 and 18 months; and (3) inmates who have been sentenced to the custody of the State but are confined in or who receive reentry or other prerelease programming and services from a local facility.

The State does not pay for pretrial detention time in a local correctional facility. Persons sentenced in Baltimore City are generally incarcerated in State correctional facilities. The Baltimore Pretrial Complex, a State-operated facility, is used primarily for pretrial detentions.

Local Revenues: Revenues increase minimally as a result of the bill’s monetary penalty provisions and cases shifting from the District Court to circuit courts.

Local Expenditures: Expenditures decrease minimally due to the bill’s incarceration penalty from inmates shifting from local detention facilities to State correctional facilities.

Counties pay the full cost of incarceration for people in their facilities for the first 12 months of the sentence. *Per diem* operating costs of local detention facilities have ranged from approximately \$40 to \$170 per inmate in recent years.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Similar bills have been introduced during previous legislative sessions. HB 914 of 2020 received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, SB 674, received a hearing in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 722 of 2019 received an unfavorable report from the House Judiciary Committee. HB 1184 of 2018 received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, but no further action was taken.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery and Prince George’s counties; Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of State Police; Department of Legislative Services

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