

# Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

122<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of Ohio

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BILL: S.B. 193 DATE: February 4, 1998  
STATUS: As Introduced SPONSOR: Sen. Suhadolnik  
LOCAL IMPACT STATEMENT REQUIRED: Yes  
CONTENTS: Applies capital punishment aggravating circumstance to all cases in which a law enforcement officer is a victim of aggravated murder

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## State Fiscal Highlights

STATE FUND	FY 1998	FY 1999	FUTURE YEARS
<b>General Revenue Fund</b>			
Revenues	- 0 -	- 0 -	- 0 -
Expenditures	No fiscal effect*	Potential increase	Potential increase

\*For the purposes of this fiscal analysis, LBO assumes that the bill's effects will not be felt until FY 1999.

- Though no new cases will enter the criminal justice system as a result of this bill, a few cases annually which were formerly murder cases may become aggravated murder cases, and some of these offenders may receive the death penalty who might not have otherwise. This would result in a minimal annual increase in expenditures to the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction for incarcerating such inmates for a longer period of time. The penalty for aggravated murder is generally life imprisonment or capital punishment, with the possibility of parole in twenty or thirty years in some cases, while the penalty for murder is fifteen years-to-life.
- There is a potential additional cost to the GRF for reimbursement to counties of expenses incurred in capital cases. Subject to available appropriations, the Public Defender Commission reimburses counties for up to 50 percent of their costs of defending indigent persons accused of capital crimes. This amount is not to exceed \$25,000 at any stage in the trial or appeals process.
- A potential increase in expenditures to the Attorney General's Office may occur as a result of representing the state interest in the federal appeals process for any case affected by this bill.

## Local Fiscal Highlights

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	FY 1998	FY 1999	FUTURE YEARS
<b>Counties</b>			
Revenues	- 0 -	- 0 -	- 0 -
Expenditures	Potential increase	Potential increase	Potential increase

- Most offenders who kill law enforcement officers generally receive aggravated murder penalties. However, as a result of the bill, a few cases which may not have been otherwise subject to aggravated murder with a death penalty specification would become aggravated murder or capital cases. Even one additional capital case in a small county with few resources or expertise in handling death penalty cases could easily exceed \$200,000 or \$300,000.



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## ***Detailed Fiscal Analysis***

### **Provisions of the Bill**

This bill expands the aggravated murder statute to explicitly include the killing of a law enforcement officer, and makes the capital punishment aggravating circumstance apply in all cases in which aggravated murder is committed against a law enforcement officer. The penalty of aggravated murder would apply to the offender regardless of whether the offender has reason to know the victim is a law enforcement officer or whether or not the officer is on-duty.

For an offender to be subject to the capital punishment aggravating circumstance, existing law requires that the offender has "reasonable cause" to know the victim to be a law enforcement officer and one of the following must also occur:

1. The victim is engaged in his or her duties, or
2. It is the offender's intent to kill a law enforcement officer.

This bill would remove all three conditions.

### **Assumptions**

Murder of a law enforcement officer is a relatively rare occurrence nationally, and in Ohio, as recent statistics can attest to. In 1996, there were seven murders of law enforcement officers reported in Ohio, and four were reported in 1997. Generally, the offenders in these cases are charged with aggravated murder, and the capital punishment specification is generally used when the officer is murdered while on-duty. The majority of cases of murder of a law enforcement officer occur when the officer is on-duty. National statistics from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate that in 1995, 6 out of 7 law enforcement deaths occurred when an officer was on duty. Statistics for Ohio are consistent with the national estimates; in 1996, one of the seven deaths of law enforcement officers involved the death of an off-duty officer. Of the police murders for which data was available for 1997, none were off-duty officers.

The bill would make the capital punishment aggravating circumstance apply in cases in which an officer is off-duty, and in cases where an undercover officer is carrying out his/her duties and the offender has no knowledge that the victim is a law enforcement officer.

The fiscal effects described herein apply to the one or two additional cases which might be affected annually by this bill. It is important to note that in some fiscal years, there would be absolutely no cases that would be affected by the provisions of this bill, resulting in no fiscal effect on the state and county government. In this sense, this fiscal analysis describes what might happen in a worst case fiscal scenario.

### **Effects on State and County Government**

Even one additional capital trial per year represents a significant local cost to most county jurisdictions, particularly to small counties with few resources or expertise in handling death penalty cases. These costs would result from prosecution, adjudication, and indigent defense in trials that would generally last considerably longer than non-capital cases. Available data suggests that it takes approximately 3.5 times longer to try a capital murder case than a similar murder case without the capital punishment specification.

Few comprehensive studies of the costs of capital trials are available. The most methodologically sound study of which LBO is aware deals with the costs of the death penalty in North Carolina. This data indicates that the cost of a capital trial through execution may range from over a quarter of a million dollars to over \$2 million. Less reliable estimates in other states indicate that the cost of a capital trial through execution may range from \$1.8 million to \$15 million.

In Ohio, there is data available concerning capital trials at the common pleas level. Recent costs of capital trials involving Lucasville riot inmates who murdered a corrections officer ranged between \$300,000 to \$500,000 per inmate. This figure includes defense, prosecution, and adjudication costs for the common pleas trial alone, and does not address the costs of subsequent appeals or incarceration.

A brief summary of how the trial and appeals process may occur is as follows:

**Common Pleas Court Trial.** The majority of the costs for this stage are absorbed by counties for prosecution, adjudication, and defense costs for indigent offenders. As it is estimated that over 90 percent of individuals facing capital trials are indigent, the cost of indigent defense becomes particularly salient in discussing capital trials. The Public Defender Commission does provide reimbursement for counties for up to 50 percent of their costs in defending indigent persons accused of capital crimes at the trial and appeals phases. However, this reimbursement is not to exceed \$12,500 per attorney assigned to an indigent defendant. Given that two defense attorneys are typically assigned to each defendant, the Public Defender Commission will reimburse counties in amounts not to exceed \$25,000 per trial. Counties may also absorb the costs of defense psychiatrists, investigators, and mitigation specialists.

**Automatic appeal to Ohio Supreme Court.** Offenders convicted of a capital offense are entitled to a mandatory appeal to the Ohio Supreme Court. At this level, counties and the Public Defender Commission fund indigent defense in the same manner as occurs at the trial stage. The county retains the financial responsibility for representing the state.

**State post-conviction relief.** It is assumed that offenders found guilty of capital offenses will be more likely to participate in exhaustive appeals processes than those found guilty of lesser offenses. Counties retain the financial responsibility for representing the state at this stage, but the Public Defender Commission generally takes over indigent defense.

**Federal habeas corpus relief.** When state remedies have been exhausted, the Attorney General's office represents the state's interests at the federal level. The Public Defender Commission represents inmates in federal court.

In addition, increased expenditures related to incarceration could possibly be incurred by the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction for maintaining additional very few inmates on death row who might otherwise have been kept with the general population. A very small number of cases which might formerly have been murder cases might possibly become aggravated murder cases, resulting in additional incarceration time. The penalty for aggravated murder is life imprisonment (with parole possible in 20 to 30 years in some cases) or capital punishment, while the penalty for murder is fifteen years to life.

□ *LBO staff: Laura Bickle, Budget/Policy Analyst*