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Detailed Fiscal Analysis

Provisions of the Bill

This bill expands the offense of aggravated murder to also prohibit purposely causing the death of a law enforcement officer or of a Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) employee. Existing law specifies the nine circumstances upon which a death penalty for aggravated murder may be based, which includes the killing of a law enforcement officer. The bill makes no changes to these existing nine circumstances, but does add a tenth capital punishment aggravating circumstance that includes the killing in specified circumstances of a DRC employee.

Killing of a Law Enforcement Officer

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. Offenders in these cases are typically 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 federal 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.

Killing of a DRC Employee

The bill expands the aggravated murder statute to include DRC employees, who are discharging their duties. The murder of a DRC employee is an even more rare Ohio occurrence than the killing of a law enforcement officer. Since 1973, eight DRC employees have been killed in the line of duty, four of which were correction officers. By adding a capital punishment aggravating circumstance specific to the killing of a DRC employee, it is possible that an occasional aggravated murder case with a death penalty specification may be created that might not have been possible under the state's current aggravated murder law.

Effects on State and County Government

The fiscal effects described herein may apply to an extremely small number of homicides annually. 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.

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 some data available on the cost of capital trials at the common pleas level. Recent costs of capital trials involving Lucasville riot inmates who murdered a correction officer ranged between \$300,000 to \$500,000 per offender. This figure includes defense, prosecution, and adjudication costs for the common pleas trial alone, and does not address the costs of subsequent appeals.

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 a 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.

Fine revenues. The maximum penalty for aggravated murder is \$25,000, while the maximum penalty for murder is \$15,000. From the perspective of revenue generation, counties could collect clearly additional money as an aggravated murder conviction carries the possibility of a higher fine. However, it is probably best not to look at this as a revenue generation opportunity, thus, the amount of additional fine money that may be collected by counties annually will most likely be negligible.

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