

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2014 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

House Bill 81 (Delegate Cluster)  
Judiciary

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**Criminal Law - Contraband - Telecommunication Devices and Accessories -  
Penalty**

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This bill makes several changes to the statutory prohibitions on “telecommunication devices” in places of confinement. The bill (1) prohibits a person from attempting to deliver a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or subscriber identification module (SIM) card to a person detained or confined in a place of confinement if signs are posted indicating that such conduct is prohibited and (2) expands the other statutory prohibitions pertaining to telecommunication devices in places of confinement to include telecommunication device chargers and SIM cards.

A first-time violation is a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for up to three years and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000. A second or subsequent offense is a felony, punishable by imprisonment for up to five years and/or a \$5,000 maximum fine.

Under the bill, a sentence imposed for knowing possession or receipt of a telecommunication device, charger, or SIM card by a person detained or confined in a place of confinement must be consecutive to any sentence that the person was serving at the time of the crime or that had been imposed but was not yet being served at the time of sentencing.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues if revenues from fines imposed in cases involving first-time violations of the attempt offense created by the bill and first-time violations involving chargers and SIM cards exceed the fine revenues shifted from the District Court to the circuit courts due to the bill’s reclassification of subsequent offenses from misdemeanors to felonies. Minimal increase in general fund expenditures due to the bill’s penalty provisions. The bill’s shifting of cases from the

District Court to the circuit courts is not expected to materially affect District Court caseloads.

**Local Effect:** Potential minimal increase in local revenues from fines imposed in circuit court cases. Minimal decrease in local expenditures if individuals who would normally serve their sentences in local correctional facilities are sentenced to State correctional facilities as a result of the bill. It is assumed that any increase in circuit court caseloads as a result of the bill can be handled with existing local resources.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Bill Summary/Current Law:** A “telecommunication device” is a device that is able to transmit telephonic, electronic, digital, cellular, or radio communications. “Telecommunication device” includes a part of such a device, regardless of whether the part itself is able to transmit.

A person detained or confined in a place of confinement may not knowingly possess or receive a telecommunication device. If signs are posted indicating that such conduct is prohibited, a person may not (1) deliver a telecommunication device to a person detained or confined in a place of confinement; (2) possess a telecommunication device with the intent to deliver it to a detained or confined person; or (3) deposit or conceal such a telecommunication device in or about a place of confinement or on any land appurtenant to such a place with the intent that the device be obtained by a detained or confined person. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to maximum penalties of imprisonment for three years and/or a fine of \$1,000.

**Exhibit 1** lists the changes to criminal penalties and offense classifications under the bill.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Changes to Offense Classifications and Criminal Penalties under the Bill**

<b><u>Offense</u></b>	<b><u>Current Penalties</u></b>	<b><u>Penalties under the Bill</u></b>
<p>Attempting to deliver a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or SIM card to a person detained or confined in a place of confinement.</p>	<p>Not a separate statutory offense.</p>	<p>First Offense: Misdemeanor: Up to three years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000.</p> <p>Second or Subsequent Offense: Felony, up to five years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000.</p>
<p>Delivering a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or SIM card to a person detained or confined in a place of confinement.</p> <p>Possessing a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or SIM card with the intent to deliver it to a detained or confined person.</p> <p>Depositing or concealing a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or SIM card in or about a place of confinement or on any land appurtenant to such a place with the intent that the device be obtained by a detained or confined person.</p>	<p>Misdemeanor: Up to three years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000.</p> <p>Current statute does not apply to chargers or SIM cards</p>	<p>First Offense: Misdemeanor: Up to three years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000.</p> <p>Second or Subsequent Offense: Felony, up to five years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000.</p>

<u>Offense</u>	<u>Current Penalties</u>	<u>Penalties under the Bill</u>
Knowing possession or receipt of a telecommunication device, telecommunication device charger, or SIM card by a detained or confined person.	<p>Misdemeanor: Up to three years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000.</p> <p>Current statute does not apply to chargers or SIM cards</p>	<p>First Offense: Misdemeanor: Up to three years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000.</p> <p>Second or Subsequent Offense: Felony, up to five years imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000.</p> <p>Sentence must be consecutive to any sentence that the person was serving at the time of the crime or that had been imposed but was not yet being served.</p>

Source: Department of Legislative Services

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**Background:** The use of telecommunication devices by inmates is a growing problem in prisons throughout the country. Cell phones provide inmates with access to the outside world, and according to prison experts, an opportunity to continue criminal activity while incarcerated. Cell phones also pose an internal threat in facilities, since they allow prison inmates to plan prison assaults, escapes, and riots. Cell phones are a lucrative form of contraband because, unlike drugs, they have significant and perpetual resale and rental potential and value.

Inmate access to cell phones recently received significant attention with the April 2013 federal indictment of 25 individuals, including inmates and 13 correctional officers employed by the department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), with conspiring to run operations of the Black Guerilla Family (BGF) gang inside the Baltimore City Detention Center and related facilities. Charges included racketeering, drug distribution, money laundering, victim and witness retaliation, bribery, and extortion. According to the indictment, correctional officers helped leaders of the BGF smuggle cell phones, drug, and other contraband into State correctional facilities.

In November 2013, an additional 19 individuals, including 14 former and current DPSCS correctional officers, were charged with conspiring to operate the BGF gang inside correctional facilities. With the November 2013 indictment, 44 individuals, including 27 correctional officers, have been charged in the case.

In response to the April 2013 indictments, the Legislative Policy Committee appointed a Special Joint Commission on Public Safety and Security in State and Local Correctional Facilities. In its December 2013 final report, the commission made several recommendations, including (1) increasing the maximum penalty for telecommunication devices-related offenses to imprisonment for five years and/or a \$3,000 fine; (2) expanding the current statutory prohibitions to include attempting to deliver a telecommunications device to a person detained or confined in a place of confinement if signs are posted indicating that such conduct is prohibited; and (3) requiring that a sentence imposed on an inmate for the commission of a telecommunication devices-related offense be served consecutively to the sentence the inmate is already serving.

A portion of the attention generated by the indictments pertained to the State's ability to suspend or terminate correctional officers engaged in the type of behavior described in the indictments. According to the Correctional Officers' Bill of Rights (Chapter 194 of 2010), the appointing authority may authorize the emergency suspension of a correctional officer without pay if the officer is charged with a *felony*. Most of the offenses related to the possession of contraband by inmates or the delivery of contraband to an inmate (including all of the offenses affected by this bill) are misdemeanors. The commission discussed this issue and recommended that State law be amended to authorize an emergency suspension without pay when a correctional officer is charged with bringing contraband into a correctional facility, irrespective of the offense's classification as a misdemeanor.

DPSCS advises that it has seized 7,379 contraband cell phones over the past six years. Since 2010, approximately 1,038 resulting charges have been filed; 618 of these charges were adjudicated, with approximately 60% of the 618 cases resulting in a guilty verdict. According to DPSCS's analysis of a sample of the convictions, approximately 30% of the defendants received a sentence of six months, nearly 15% received a sentence of one year, and 15 individuals received the maximum sentence of three years.

According to the Maryland Sentencing Guidelines database, there were 7 convictions for telecommunication devices-related offenses in Maryland's circuit courts in fiscal 2011, 8 convictions in fiscal 2012, and 10 convictions in fiscal 2013.

**State Revenues:** General fund revenues may increase minimally if revenues from fines imposed in cases involving first-time violations of the attempt offense created by the bill and first-time offenses involving chargers and SIM cards exceed revenues from fines imposed in cases involving subsequent offenses that are shifted from the District Court to the circuit courts as a result of the bill's reclassification of subsequent offenses from misdemeanors to felonies. In general, misdemeanor cases are heard in the District Court and felony cases are heard in the circuit courts. Fines imposed in District Court cases are

general fund revenues; fines imposed in circuit court cases go to the appropriate local jurisdiction. Because the bill changes certain offenses from misdemeanors to felonies and transfers these cases to the circuit courts, any potential new fine revenue from these cases goes to local jurisdictions.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase minimally as a result of the bill's incarceration penalties due to more people being committed to State correctional facilities and people being committed to State correctional facilities for longer periods of time.

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 \$3,100 per month. This bill alone, however, should not create the need for additional beds, personnel, or facilities. Excluding overhead, the average cost of housing a new State inmate (including variable health care costs) is about \$735 per month. Excluding all health care, the average variable costs total \$185 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. Prior to fiscal 2010, the State reimbursed counties for part of their incarceration costs, on a per diem basis, after a person had served 90 days. Currently, the State provides assistance to the counties for locally sentenced inmates and for inmates who are sentenced to and awaiting transfer to the State correctional system. A \$45 per diem grant is provided to each county for each day between 12 and 18 months that a sentenced inmate is confined in a local detention center. Counties also receive an additional \$45 per day grant for inmates who have been sentenced to the custody of the State but are confined in 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 City Detention Center, a State-operated facility, is used primarily for pretrial detentions.

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 enhanced 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.

**Local Revenues:** Local revenues may increase minimally from monetary penalties imposed in additional circuit court cases.

**Local Expenditures:** Expenditures decrease minimally if individuals who would normally be sentenced to local correctional facilities are sent to State correctional facilities as a result of the bill. Counties pay the full cost of incarceration for people in their facilities for the first 12 months of the sentence. A \$45 per diem State grant is provided to each county for each day between 12 and 18 months that a sentenced inmate is confined in a local detention center. Counties also receive an additional \$45 per day grant for inmates who have been sentenced to the custody of the State but are confined in a local facility. Per diem operating costs of local detention facilities have ranged from approximately \$60 to \$160 per inmate in recent years.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Baltimore, Dorchester, Garrett, and Montgomery counties; Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of State Police; Office of the Public Defender; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; State's Attorneys' Association; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Amy A. Devadas

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510