

FISCAL NOTE TO  
**SENATE, No. 251**

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 30, 1996

Senate Bill No. 251 of 1996, the "Review and Parole Act of 1995", would implement major changes to New Jersey's parole system. Under the bill, the inmate would bear the burden of demonstrating through clear and convincing evidence that he should be released after a careful review process. Under current law, the State has the burden of demonstrating the reasons why an inmate should not be released. The bill creates an appointed Review and Parole Board made up of nine members, to replace the existing parole board. The decision to release an inmate would be made by the appropriate Review and Parole Board Panel on recommendation from a release hearing officer.

The bill requires specific education backgrounds for board members, parole officers and hearing officers.

Under the provisions of the bill, all responsibilities, functions, and employees comprising the parole process, including the Parole Board and staff, the Bureau of Parole in the Department of Corrections, and all others would be transferred to the Review and Parole Board. All non-parole services would remain within the Department of Corrections.

The bill would change the current Parole Bureau's 13 district offices to 10 district offices along with regional offices in the northern, southern and central regions of the State. A victim services component would be established in each district office to address victim concerns, to provide mediation services and foster a sensitivity within the parolee for harm done to victims. The regional offices also would function as restitution centers where parolees who are not eligible to be released from field officer caseloads due to unpaid fines, fees and assessments imposed by the courts or pursuant to law would be transferred. Parolees would also be permitted to perform community service in lieu of paying their fees, fines or assessments.

This bill would remove the county parole responsibility from the new Review and Parole Board. Instead, a person sentenced to a term of imprisonment in a county correctional institution would be placed on probation and would serve a period of imprisonment as a condition of probation.

The Department of Corrections states that the primary fiscal impact of this bill would come from the provisions concerning inmate readiness for release. With the elimination of presumptive parole and the setting of higher standards for granting parole, inmate population will increase through longer lengths of stay (LOS). Currently, there

is no way for the department to assess the extent to which length of stay might increase under the bill. However, with an annual admission volume of 12,000 inmates per year, each one month increase in LOS would yield 1,000 additional inmates. Based on the current average sentence of less than 20 years, and the average length of stay of 6.6 years or less, (one third of 20 years or less), most of that increase will accrue by year seven following enactment.

The department further states that additional staff and equipment may be required for the establishment of an Office of Victim Services within each district office, and for the establishment of a restitution center within each of the three regional offices.

The Office of Legislative Services concurs and adds that the cost of incarcerating an offender in one of the State's institutions totals about \$26,000 annually. If it become necessary to construct additional bed space to house these offenders, the State would incur one-time capital construction costs of \$80,000 per bed.

This fiscal note has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67.