

SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

SENATE, No. 591

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 2, 1996

The Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 591 (1R).

Senate Bill No. 591 (1R) establishes a "New Jersey Shade Tree and Community Forestry Program" in the Division of Parks and Forestry in the Department of Environmental Protection. The State Forester would supervise the program. The program would assist county and municipal governments in the planning and management of local tree care programs. In addition, the program would award grants to local governments for projects and programs concerned with shade tree and community forest preservation, including the development and implementation of a comprehensive community forestry plan.

The bill also establishes a Community Forestry Council of 20 members appointed by the State Forester. The council will advise and assist the State Forester.

The bill provides for the issuance of a shade tree and community forest preservation license plate. The revenues from the issuance of these plates will be deposited in a Shade Tree and Community Forest Preservation License Plate Fund. A fee of \$50 would be charged by the Division of Motor Vehicles for the purchase of each plate, and an annual renewal fee of \$10 would be subsequently assessed. Monies in the fund would be dedicated to the support of projects and programs concerned with shade tree and community forest preservation at the municipal and county levels. The Division of Parks and Forestry in the Department of Environmental Protection would administer the fund and the awarding of grants from monies in the fund.

Finally, the bill supplements the New Jersey Tort Claims Act (N.J.S.59:1-1 et seq.) to provide immunity from liability for certain action of a shade tree commission, member of a commission or a community forestry program volunteer.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill does not provide an appropriation for the administrative costs of this new program. Start-up costs will be minimal because existing staff and resources of the Department of Environmental Protection could be used to implement and operate this program.

Additional program expenses that cannot be covered by the department could potentially be offset by revenues from grant application fees. Funds for grant awards will come from the revenues generated by the issuance of special license plates. Funds in addition to those revenues will depend upon annual appropriations by the Legislature.

The Division of Motor Vehicles has estimated, in the past on other similar bills that authorized the issuance of special license plates, that the total initial fixed costs for establishing a new special license plate are \$41,000. Since it is difficult to estimate public interest in a new special license plates, it is not known how much revenue will be generated by the enactment of this bill. However as an example, the Division of Motor Vehicles has estimated that for FY 1996 revenues from special plates for animal welfare will provide about \$433,000, plates for wildlife conservation will provide \$236,000 and plates for shore conservation will provide \$899,000.