

FISCAL NOTE TO
SENATE, No. 691
STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 6, 1997

Senate Bill No. 691 of 1996 would grant Statewide police powers to duly appointed probation officers who successfully complete a police training program approved by the Police Training Commission. Upon receiving such training, they will be empowered to act as officers for the detection, apprehension, arrest and conviction of offenders against the law and shall have full power of arrest for any crime committed in their presence anywhere within the State of New Jersey. In addition, the bill provides that duly appointed and trained probation officers carry a firearm while in the actual performance of their duties.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) states that costs would be incurred for the development of a curriculum, training in weapons use, weapons and ammunition purchases, and medical examinations required for training and facilities.

The AOC notes that Statewide, during FY 1996, approximately 1,900 probation staff would be eligible for the training proposed by the bill. It is estimated that the AOC would accomplish this training over a three-year period, training about 635 probation officers per year. At a cost of \$1,600 per officer for training, medical exams and firearms and ammunition, the AOC states that this bill would cost about \$1 million per year for three years, for a three-year cost of \$3 million.

Staff and overhead costs for the training requirement of the bill include \$65,000 for two positions for each of the three years that training is conducted, and \$55,000 during year one, and \$15,000 during years two and three for office-related expenses.

The AOC further notes that it would be necessary to withdraw 635 probation officers from their posts for 18 weeks for training. While these officers are absent from the workforce, it would be necessary to hire additional staff, or to pay the working officers overtime in order to minimize the case backlog. At an average salary of \$30,000 per year and a fringe benefits cost of 26.95 percent, it would cost about \$8.7 million per year, for three years to replace these officers with new recruits, who, after the three year period, could be used to fill the current staffing deficit of 350 positions. The cost of overseeing cases left unserved by absent probation officers through overtime would be about \$10.5 million per year for three years.

The Office of Legislative Services concurs, and adds that the proposed bill could result in probation officers becoming eligible for

membership in the Police and Firemen's Retirement System (PFRS). Currently, these officers are members of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). The State contribution for members of the PERS is about 2.29 percent of the employee's gross salary, while it is about 19.2 percent for PFRS members. Thus at an average salary of \$30,000, the State's annual contribution would increase from \$687 per member per year, to \$5,760 per member per year, an annual increase of \$5,073 per member. The total annual cost of covering 1,900 members under PFRS would be \$9,638,700. Future year costs would be determined by the annual rate of salary increases.

The OLS notes that the potential costs associated with the possible membership in the PFRS would not automatically result from enactment of the bill. According to the Department of the Treasury, such membership would still require approval by the board of trustees of the PFRS.

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