

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 757

Parole for Adolescent Offenders

SPONSOR(S): Weinstein

TIED BILLS:

IDEN./SIM. BILLS: SB 1430

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR
1) Public Safety & Domestic Security Policy Committee		Krol	Kramer
2) Criminal & Civil Justice Policy Council			
3) Criminal & Civil Justice Appropriations Committee			
4) Full Appropriations Council on General Government & Health Care			
5)			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

This bill creates a new inmate designation, "adolescent offender," which is defined as an offender, 15 years old or younger at the time the criminal act was committed, who was sentenced to life or to a single or cumulative term of imprisonment of 10 years or more, and has served 8 years of their sentence. The bill creates the possibility of parole release for adolescent offenders. The bill excludes an adolescent offender from parole eligibility if he or she had a prior conviction for a number of specified offenses. Also, the bill provides that the offender must serve a minimum of 8 years of their sentence before becoming eligible for release.

The bill requires the Florida Parole Commission to conduct an initial eligibility interview with the adolescent offender during the 8th year of incarceration, and every 2 years thereafter. To be eligible for parole, the offender must have completed a General Educational Development (GED) program and received no disciplinary reports for a period of at least two years. The bill provides additional criteria for the consideration of the offender's rehabilitation status. If an offender is not granted parole after an initial eligibility interview, the bill provides they will be interviewed 2 years after the initial interview and every 2 years thereafter.

The bill specifies that an eligible offender must be placed in a facility designated for adolescent offenders that has a GED program. If not paroled before reaching 25 years of age, an offender must be transferred to an adult facility that has a GED program.

The bill provides that if the offender is granted parole, he or she must participate in any available reentry program for 2 years.

This bill will take effect upon becoming a law and will apply retroactively.

HOUSE PRINCIPLES

Members are encouraged to evaluate proposed legislation in light of the following guiding principles of the House of Representatives

- Balance the state budget.
- Create a legal and regulatory environment that fosters economic growth and job creation.
- Lower the tax burden on families and businesses.
- Reverse or restrain the growth of government.
- Promote public safety.
- Promote educational accountability, excellence, and choice.
- Foster respect for the family and for innocent human life.
- Protect Florida's natural beauty.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Parole

Parole is a discretionary prison release mechanism administered by the Florida Parole Commission (commission) through chs. 947, 948, and 949, F.S. An inmate who is granted parole is allowed to serve the remainder of his or her prison sentence outside of confinement according to terms and conditions established by the commission. Parolees are supervised by Correctional Probation Officers of the Department of Corrections (department). Inmates who were sentenced as adults for offenses committed prior to reaching 18 years of age are eligible for parole on the same basis as other inmates. Parole is not available for most crimes that were committed on or after October 1, 1983.¹ There is no parole eligibility for any crime committed on or after October 1, 1995. The commission reports that currently there are approximately 6,000 Florida inmates still eligible for parole consideration with about 500 under supervision in the community. This includes a small percentage who committed their parole-eligible crime when they were less than 18 years of age.²

The parole process begins with the setting of a presumptive parole release date (PPRD) by the commission after a parole examiner reviews the inmate's file and makes an initial recommendation. The date of the initial interview depends upon the length and type of the parole-eligible sentence. For example, an inmate with a minimum mandatory sentence of 7 to 15 years is not eligible to have an initial interview sooner than 12 months prior to expiration of the minimum mandatory portion of the sentence. An inmate may request one review of the initial PPRD within 60 days after notification.

If the PPRD is more than 2 years after the date of the initial interview, in most cases a hearing examiner must interview the inmate to review the PPRD within 2 years after the initial interview and every 2 years thereafter.³ These interviews are limited to determining whether or not information has

¹ The exceptions are for capital felony murders committed prior to October 1, 1994, and capital felony sexual battery prior to October 1, 1995.

² Parole Commission 2009 Analysis of HB 757.

³ However, s. 947.16(4)(g), F.S., provides for less frequent reviews for an inmate whose PPRD is more than 5 years from the date of the initial interview if he or she was convicted of murder, attempted murder, sexual battery, or attempted sexual battery, or is serving a 25-year minimum mandatory sentence under s. 775.082, F.S. In such cases, the interview

been gathered which might affect the PPRD.⁴ The department is responsible for bringing to the attention of the commission any information that may be pertinent for review, such as current progress reports, psychological reports, and disciplinary reports.⁵ In consultation with the department, the commission has developed guidelines defining unsatisfactory institutional record.⁶ The commission has defined what constitutes a satisfactory release plan and verification of the plan prior to release.⁷

The commission determines the terms and conditions of parole. Statutorily, conditions of parole are not specific, except for provisions that require:

- The offender to submit to random substance abuse testing, if the offender's conviction was for a controlled substance violation.
- The offender to not knowingly associate with other criminal gang members or associates, if the offender's conviction was for a crime that involved criminal gang activity.
- The offender to pay debt due and owing to the state under s. 960.17, F.S., or attorney's fees and costs due and owing to the state under s. 938.29, F.S.⁸
- The offender to pay victim restitution.⁹
- The offender to apply for services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, if the offender has been diagnosed as mentally retarded.¹⁰

Most crimes committed by juveniles¹¹ are dealt with through delinquency proceedings as set forth in ch. 985, F.S. However, the law provides a mechanism for juvenile offenders to be tried and handled as adults. A person who commits a crime while 13 years old or younger may only be tried as an adult if a grand jury indictment is returned.¹² A juvenile who is fourteen or older at the time of committing certain felony offenses may be tried as an adult if a grand jury indictment is returned; if juvenile court jurisdiction is waived and the case is transferred for prosecution as an adult pursuant to s. 985.556, F.S.; or if the state attorney direct files an information in adult court pursuant to s. 985.557, F.S. Section 985. 58, F.S., provides that a juvenile charged with an offense punishable by death or life imprisonment may not be tried as an adult unless a grand jury indictment is returned.

Sentencing and Classification of Offenders

A court may sentence as a "youthful offender" any person:

- Who is at least 18 years of age or who has been transferred for prosecution to the criminal division of the circuit court pursuant to ch. 985, F.S.;

and review may be conducted every 5 years if the commission makes a written finding that it is not reasonable to expect that parole will be granted.

⁴ Section 947.174(1)(c), F.S.

⁵ Section 947.174(3), F.S.

⁶ Section 947.174(5)(a), F.S.

⁷ Section 947.174(5)(b), F.S.

⁸ Section 947.18, F.S.

⁹ Section 947.181, F.S.

¹⁰ Section 947.185, F.S.

¹¹ Section 985.03(6), F.S., defines juvenile as "any unmarried person under the age of 18 who has not been emancipated by order of the court and who has been found or alleged to be dependent, in need of services, or from a family in need of services; or any married or unmarried person who is charged with a violation of law occurring prior to the time that person reached the age of 18 years."

¹² See *Tate v. State*, 864 So.2d 44 (Fla. 4th Dist. 2003).

- Who is found guilty of or who has tendered, and the court has accepted, a plea of nolo contendere or guilty to a crime that is, under the laws of this state, a felony if such crime was committed before the defendant's 21st birthday; and
- Who has not previously been classified as a youthful offender under the provisions of the Florida Youthful Offender Act;¹³ however, any person found guilty of a capital or life felony may not be sentenced as a youthful offender under the act.¹⁴

Separate institutions and programs exist for youthful offenders that fall into two age groups: age 14 to 18 years old and age 19 to 24 years old.¹⁵ The department may initially assign inmates who are less than 18 years of age and who have not been assigned by the sentencing judge to a facility for youthful offenders under the provisions of chapter 958 to a facility designated for youthful offenders.¹⁶ The department is required to screen all institutions, facilities, and programs for inmates who meet the requirements specified in s. 958.04(1)(a) and (c) whose age does not exceed 24 years and whose total length of sentence does not exceed 10 years and the department may classify those inmates as a youthful offender. The department may classify any inmate 19 years of age or younger, except a capital or life felon, as a youthful offender if the department determines that the inmate's mental or physical vulnerability would substantially or materially jeopardize his or her safety in a non-youthful facility.¹⁷

Parole hearings for juveniles who received more than a 10 year adult prison sentence is one of the recommendations made by the Blueprint Commission through the Department of Juvenile Justice.¹⁸

HB 757 creates the offender designation of adolescent offender, which is defined as an offender who was 15 years old or younger at the time of the criminal act who is sentenced to life or to a single or cumulative term of imprisonment of 10 years or more, and has served 8 years of the sentence. An adolescent offender may be eligible for parole release.

The bill defines the term "current offense" as one or more crimes committed by the adolescent offender within a 1-month period of time or for which sentences run concurrently.

The bill excludes an adolescent offender from parole eligibility if he or she, before the current offense, had plea nolo contendere to or had a prior conviction for a number of specified offenses:

- Murder,
- Felony battery,
- Aggravated battery,
- Assault or battery of law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical care providers, public transit employees or agents or other specified officers,
- Assault or battery on persons 65 years of age or older,
- Persons engaged in criminal offense, having weapons,
- Sexual battery,
- Abuse, aggravated abuse, and neglect of a child, or
- Cruelty to animals

The bill requires the commission to conduct an initial eligibility interview during the 8th year of incarceration, and every 2 years thereafter. To be eligible for parole, the offender must have completed

¹³ Sections 958.011-958.15, F.S.

¹⁴ Section 958.04(1), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 958.11(1), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 944.1905(5)(a), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 958.11(6), F.S.

¹⁸ "Getting Smart about Juvenile Justice in Florida," January 2008.

a General Educational Development (GED) program and received no disciplinary reports for a period of at least two years. The bill provides additional criteria for the consideration of the offender's rehabilitation status. The hearing examiner must consider whether:

- The offender was principal to the criminal offense or an accomplice, a relatively minor participant, or acted under extreme duress or domination or another,
- The offender has shown remorse for the criminal offense,
- The offender's age, maturity, and psychological development at the time of the offense affected her or his behavior,
- The offender, while in the custody of the department, aided inmates suffering from catastrophic or terminal medical, mental or physical conditions or has prevented risk or injury to staff, citizens, or other inmates,
- The offender has successfully completed educational and self-rehabilitation programs,
- The offender was a victim of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, and
- The wishes of the victim or the opinions of the victim's next of kin have been taken into serious consideration.

The bill specifies that an offender must be placed in a facility designated for adolescent offenders that has a GED program. The department currently has no facilities designated as adolescent facilities. Besides the requirement that it have a GED program, the bill does not provide language that describes requirements for a facility to be considered as an adolescent facility. If not paroled before reaching 25 years of age, an offender must be transferred to an adult facility that has a GED program.¹⁹

The department reports that 448 inmates currently incarcerated committed their primary offense at age 15 or younger and are serving a sentence of 10 years or more. Of these inmates, 148 have served 8 years of their sentence and would be eligible for an initial interview. Of these 148 inmates, 68 have attained GEDs.²⁰

Offense Category	Potential Eligible Inmates	Potential Eligible Inmates, 8 years
Murder/Manslaughter	170	83
Aggravated Assault/Battery, Violent	49	11
Sexual/Lewd Behavior	64	15
Robbery	112	26
Burglary	44	11
Property Theft/Damage/Fraud	2	1
Other	7	1
Total	448	148

The bill provides that if the offender is granted parole, he or she must participate in any available reentry program for 2 years.

¹⁹ According to the Department of Corrections 2009 Analysis of HB 757, currently only one third of the adult facilities have GED programs.

²⁰ Department of Corrections 2009 Analysis of HB 757.

This bill will take effect upon becoming a law and will apply retroactively.

- B. SECTION DIRECTORY: Section 1. Provides a title for this act as the "Second Chance for Children in Prison Act of 2009."

Section 2. Amends s. 947.16, F.S.; an act relating to eligibility for parole; initial parole interviews; powers and duties of commission.

Section 3. Provides that if an adolescent offender is eligible, he or she must receive an initial interview in their 8th or subsequent year of incarceration on the effective date of this act.

Section 4. This bill takes effect upon becoming a law and will be applied retroactively.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

See "Fiscal Comments."

2. Expenditures:

See "Fiscal Comments."

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The Department of Corrections reports that reviewing current cases and future cases of adolescent offenders would create a slight work increase. For Fiscal Year 2007-2008, the annual cost to house a male youthful offender exceeded \$22,000. The Department reports that it does not anticipate a significant number of inmates would be paroled to justify additional probation officers; the cost avoidance if inmates were released from prison would be offset slightly due to the cost of supervision.

The Parole Commission reports an indeterminate fiscal cost.

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference reported that HB 757 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable because this bill does not appear to: require cities or counties to spend funds or take actions requiring the expenditure of funds; reduce the authority that cities or counties have to raise revenues in the aggregate; or reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with cities or counties.

2. Other:

There may be a potential challenge regarding the Equal Protection Clause due to the fact that offenders who have mental impairments or disabilities may not be able to comply with the GED requirements and therefore would not be eligible for parole.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

The bill provides very specific language for the hearing examiner to consider regarding whether the inmate has "aided inmates suffering from catastrophic or terminal medical, mental, or physical conditions or has prevented risk or injury to staff, citizens, or other inmates. This language may be tailored to a situation applicable to an inmate who may be affected by this bill if passed. The language provided in this section applies only to the consideration of the hearing examiner but does not specify if the commission should also consider this criterion when deciding whether the offender is rehabilitated.

The bill refers to convictions for specific prior offenses that will render an adolescent inmate ineligible for parole. Juveniles with prior offenses may have been processed through the juvenile system where juveniles are not considered "convicted," but rather adjudicated delinquent.

The bill would allow adolescent offenders to circumvent the mandatory 85% minimum sentenced served requirement as provided in s. 944.275(4)(b)3., F.S.

The bill does not provide the department an alternative if a suitable re-entry program is not available for a paroled offender.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES