

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Provide limited government -- This bill prohibits certain government regulation.

Promote personal responsibility -- This bill may increase monitoring of persons charged with a criminal offense. This bill requires such person to pay the cost of the monitoring.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Florida's Constitution provides that, unless a person is charged with a capital offense or an offense punishable by life imprisonment and the proof of guilt is evident or the presumption is great, every person charged with a crime or violation of municipal or county ordinance is entitled to pretrial release on reasonable conditions. If no conditions of release can reasonably protect the community from risk of physical harm to persons, assure the presence of the accused at trial, or assure the integrity of the judicial process, the accused may be detained.¹

All persons detained for criminal offenses have a right to a first appearance hearing within 24 hours of arrest.² The primary function of the first appearance hearing is a determination regarding pretrial release.³

Bail is a set sum of money, paid to the sheriff prior to release, that is commonly used as a condition of pretrial release. A person released on bail becomes an "absconder" and forfeits the bail if he or she fails to appear before the court at the appointed time. As an alternative to posting bail, the person may employ the services of a bail bond agent. The bail bond agent does not pay the bail amount, but acts as a surety, promising to pay the bail amount should the defendant become an absconder. Bail bond agents are authorized to track, detain, and bring an absconder before the sheriff; a bail bond agent that returns an absconder may recover some or all of the bail. Florida licenses bail bond agents through the Department of Financial Services.

In addition to bail, courts impose any number of other conditions of pretrial release intended to ensure the defendant appears at trial and does no further harm in society. Those conditions may require the defendant to stay in, or stay away from, a particular location.

A recent innovation in the criminal justice arena is electronic monitoring of persons.⁴ Electronic monitoring is a process whereby a person's whereabouts are tracked through use of a transmitter securely attached to the offender, and a receiver or receivers that receive the signal. Early devices were used for house arrest circumstances, utilizing a simple proximity signal and a receiver in the home. Later devices use technologies such as radio frequency, cellular telephone, and GPS, to provide tracking systems that can provide location information on a 24 hour basis.

¹ Article I, s. 14, Fla.Const.

² Rule 3.130(a), Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure.

³ Rules 3.130(d) and 3.131(b).

⁴ Section 907.041(4)(b), F.S. provides the court with discretion to release an accused on "electronic monitoring" or on recognizance bond if the findings on the record of facts warrant such a release.

In the juvenile law setting, electronic monitoring is one of the forms of pretrial detention that can be ordered if allowed by the risk assessment instrument.⁵ Electronic monitoring administered by the Department of Corrections is currently used for adult offenders on probation.⁶ There is no statutory prohibition on the use of electronic monitoring for pretrial release. Pretrial release is a function of local law enforcement, therefore, if a court orders electronic monitoring of a person on pretrial release, the state would not be involved.

Effect of Bill

This bill amends the law licensing bail bond agents, at s. 648.387, F.S., to provide that a licensed bail bond agent may also provide electronic monitoring of persons as a condition of pretrial release, or for other reasons “deemed appropriate by a court or sheriff.” A bail bond agency may “collect a reasonable nonrefundable fee for electronic monitoring services from the person who is subject to electronic monitoring.” This bill does not specify the fee, does not provide how reasonableness is determined, and does not place any person or agency in a position to make a determination as to reasonableness should a person object to the bail bond agent’s determination of a fee. A bail bond agent may take the person into custody and return the person to the sheriff if the monitored person fails to timely pay for the monitoring service. The Department of Financial Services, which agency licenses bail bond agents, may not set the fee nor discipline a bail bond agent regarding assessment or collection of the fee.

Chapter 903, F.S., governs bail. This bill creates a new section in ch. 903, F.S., to specifically allow electronic monitoring of a defendant released from custody prior to trial. The court may order the defendant to pay the cost of monitoring, and the failure to pay for monitoring is grounds for revocation of the pretrial release. Upon revocation, a defendant is arrested and returned to custody.

An entity providing electronic monitoring must “forthwith” report any known violation of the terms of pretrial release to the court, sheriff, state attorney, and bail bond agent. There is no specified penalty for failure to do so.

This bill creates a new third degree felony. A person commits the offense if he or she is a defendant on pretrial release who alters, tampers, damages, or destroys any electronic monitoring equipment. This new offense is not ranked, and thus is a Level 1 offense under the Criminal Punishment Code.

This bill provides that it does not limit other provisions of the bail law in ch. 903, F.S.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. amends s. 648.387, F.S., to amend the law regulating bail bond agents to allow bail bond agents to provide electronic monitoring.

Section 2. creates s. 903.0472, F.S., to provide for electronic monitoring of persons on bail.

Section 3. provides an effective date of July 1, 2005.

⁵ See s. 985.215, F.S. The Risk Assessment Instrument provided in s. 985.215, F.S. is utilized at a detention hearing to determine the appropriate level of detention of a juvenile pending resolution of a pending charge. The instrument functions as a score sheet which factors in the seriousness of the current offense and a juvenile’s past criminal history by assigning each a certain number of points. Juveniles scoring 0-9 points must be released to home detention, which entails supervision by the youth’s parents with some restrictions ordered by the court. Juveniles scoring 9-11 points may be released on home detention with an electronic monitor. Juveniles scoring 12 points or high must be held in secure detention for 21 days (or in serious cases 30 days) until they plea or have an adjudicatory hearing, at which time the question of detention status is revisited by the court, again utilizing the Risk Assessment Instrument.

⁶ Section 948.03, F.S.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

Those local governments or courts currently providing electronic monitoring services in their jurisdictions would have the option of permitting bail bond services to provide these services. Since the cost of the service would be borne by the defendant, this may result in a reduction in costs for those governments currently providing electronic monitoring.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Bondsmen would be able to charge a fee from the defendant for electronic monitoring services and would be able to contract with local governments for these services. In addition, companies which provide the equipment and monitoring services would be able to profit from increased demand for their products and services.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Although current law allows for pretrial release on electronic monitoring, there is no apparent single way that electronic monitoring is provided, if at all, within a given jurisdiction. The current costs are borne by local governments or courts, and occasionally the Department of Corrections may enter into informal agreements with a locality to provide the service as a part of its normal probationary electronic monitoring programs. The bill would enable bail bondsmen to contract with local governments for this service, and to extract a "reasonable fee" from defendants released on electronic monitoring. Because, the bill does not define the term "reasonable," there may be a need in the future for a court to interpret this term.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable.

2. Other:

One issue which could arise in the bill is whether the nonpayment of fees which would result in a violation of pretrial release would constitute an impermissible "imprisonment for debt." Article I, Section 11, of the Florida Constitution forbids the government from imprisoning persons for nonpayment of financial obligations, unless the debtor has engaged in fraud. This provision, however, does not generally apply to criminal fines, and insofar as the fees associated with electronic monitoring may be considered a court fine or fee, it may withstand constitutional scrutiny.

See *Turner v. State*, 168 So.2d 192 (Fla. 3d DCA 1964). In a similar vein, if the fees are viewed as an obligation for pretrial release similar to payment of a cash bond, there may not be a constitutional issue.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The bill specifically exempts the fees collected for electronic monitoring from the provisions of s. 648.26. Section 648.26, F.S. provides, in part, for the Department of Financial Services to make rules related to the regulation for fees collected by bond agents. Fees collected by bond agents pursuant to the bill would be exempt from regulation by the Department of Financial Services.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES

n/a