

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA**



**Session 2007**

**Legislative Incarceration Fiscal Note**

**(G.S. 120-36.7)**

**BILL NUMBER:** House Bill 47 (First Edition)  
**SHORT TITLE:** Violate Order/Possess Deadly Weapon Felony.  
**SPONSOR(S):** Representatives Jeffus, McLawhorn, Ross, and Farmer-Butterfield

	<b>FISCAL IMPACT</b>				
	<b>Yes (X)</b>	<b>No ( )</b>	<b>No Estimate Available ( )</b>		
	<b><u>FY 2007-08</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2008-09</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2009-10</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2010-11</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2011-12</u></b>
<b>GENERAL FUND</b>					
<b>Correction</b>					
<b>Recurring</b>					
<b>Nonrecurring</b>					
<b>Judicial</b>					
<b>Recurring</b>					
<b>Nonrecurring</b>					
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES:</b>					
					Amount cannot be determined.
<b>ADDITIONAL PRISON BEDS:</b>					
(cumulative)*					Amount cannot be determined.
<b>POSITIONS:</b>					
(cumulative)					Amount cannot be determined.
<b>PRINCIPAL DEPARTMENT(S) &amp; PROGRAM(S) AFFECTED:</b>	Department of Correction; Judicial Branch.				
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b>	December 1, 2007.				
*This fiscal analysis is independent of the impact of other criminal penalty bills being considered by the General Assembly, which could also increase the projected prison population and thus the availability of prison beds in future years. The Fiscal Research Division is tracking the cumulative effect of all criminal penalty bills on the prison system as well as the Judicial Department.					

**BILL SUMMARY:** H.B. 47 amends G.S. 50B-4.1 to add subsection (g), which creates a new Class G felony offense for knowingly violating a protective order by failing to stay away from a place or person as directed by the order, and to do so while possessing a deadly weapon. It also makes conforming changes to specify that this new penalty is not subject to the current penalty enhancement provided in subsection (d) of G.S. 50B-4.1. H.B. 47 becomes effective December 1, 2007, and applies to offenses committed on or after that date.

**ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY:**

**General**

General violation of a protective order is a Class A1 misdemeanor (G.S. 50B-4.1(a)). However, if such violation is concurrent to the commission of another felony, excluding Class A or B1 offenses, punishment for the principal felony offense is elevated by one offense class (G.S. 50B-4.1(d)). In addition, violation after three previous convictions for offenses under Chapter 50B is a Class H felony (G.S. 50B-4.1(f)).

The proposed offense enhances the penalty for general violation of a protective order by adding the condition for possession of a “deadly weapon.” Because current charge and conviction data do not distinguish general violation offenses that involve simple possession, there is no reliable basis upon which to project the number of future offenses that would meet the criteria of this new offense. *However, the relatively high frequencies of charge and conviction for domestic violence protective order (DVPO) violation suggest that the impact of this offense could be significant.*

**Department of Correction: Division of Prisons**

Based on the most recent prison population projections and estimated available bed capacity, *there are no surplus prison beds available over the immediate five-year horizon or beyond. Therefore, any new felony conviction that results in an active sentence will require an additional prison bed.*

Class A1 misdemeanants sentenced to active punishment typically serve the designated term of incarceration within a local jail.<sup>1</sup> However, most active sentences for felony convictions are served in state prison.<sup>2</sup> *Thus, the new, enhanced penalty (Class G felony) for violating a protective order while possessing a deadly weapon will not only lengthen time served for such offense, but also require imprisonment within a state facility.*

Although a projection of future offenses is unavailable, prior year conviction data for DVPO violations provide some indication of potential impact. In FY 2005-06, there were 1,369 misdemeanor convictions for violation of a valid protective order (G.S. 50B-4.1(a)), and eight Class H felony convictions for repeated violation (G.S. 50B-4.1(f)). Of these 1,369 misdemeanor convictions, *eight also had a concurrent conviction for an offense involving a deadly weapon.*<sup>3</sup> *However, it is unlikely that this statistic captures all DVPO violations involving possession of a deadly weapon. Accordingly, the number of actual offenses could vary.*

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<sup>1</sup> In FY 2004-05, 25% of Class A1 misdemeanants (for all crimes and prior record levels) received active sentences, with an average time served of 73 days.

<sup>2</sup> Active sentences between 1-90 days are served in local jails. The Department of Correction reimburses counties \$18 for each day that offenders are housed longer than 30 days (between 30 and 90). Sentences longer than 90 days are to be served in state prison; however, when bed shortages demand it, the State may lease needed beds from counties.

<sup>3</sup> Sentencing Commission data, based on sentencing episodes, indicates that these eight “concurrent” offenses involving a deadly weapon were sentenced on the same dates as DVPO (G.S. 50B-4.1) violations.

In FY 2005-06, 42% of Class G convictions resulted in active sentences, with an average estimated time served of 16 months. For illustrative purposes, if eight convictions for this new offense were to occur per year, *the combination of active sentences and probation revocations could require four additional prison beds in the first applicable year; seven additional beds in the second year; and three new employees in the second year.*

Assuming inmate assignment to medium custody, the construction of seven prison beds within a new, stand alone facility could cost the State \$476,280 in FY 2007-08; conversely, bed construction within an add-on facility could cost approximately \$294,840.<sup>4</sup> These costs are attributed to FY 2007-08 since the construction of additional prison beds, whether within an add-on or stand-alone facility, requires budgeting at least three years in advance. Potential operating costs could total \$113,000 in FY 2008-09, and \$203,684 in FY 2009-10.<sup>5</sup>

### **Department of Correction – Division of Community Corrections**

In FY 2004-05, 58% of Class G felony convictions resulted in either intermediate or community punishments, predominantly special, intensive, or general supervision probation. *Thus, assuming that future convictions for the new offense were to occur, the Division of Community Corrections (DCC) would likely assume additional costs for offenders placed under its jurisdiction.* It is not known exactly how many offenders would be sentenced to intermediate or community punishments, to which type, or for how long.

Presently, general supervision of intermediate and community offenders by a probation officer costs DCC \$1.96 per offender, per day; no cost is assumed for those receiving unsupervised probation, or who are ordered only to pay fines, fees, or restitution. DCC also incurs a daily cost of \$0.69 per offender sentenced to the Community Service Work Program. However, the daily cost per offender on intermediate sanction is much higher, ranging from \$7.71 to \$14.97 depending on the type of sanction. Intensive supervision probation is the most frequently used intermediate sanction, and costs an estimated \$14.97 per offender, per day. On average, intensive supervision lasts six-months, with general supervision assumed for a designated period thereafter.

### **Judicial Branch**

Based on preliminary data, there were 4,053 defendants charged under G.S. 50B-4.1, most for a general violation offense (4,024). While it is not known how many charges might occur for the new, enhanced offense, *the Administrative Office of the Courts anticipates that any penalty enhancement would be accompanied by more vigorous defense and prosecution, and would thereby increase court time and associated costs for case disposal.*

A general violation offense (Class A1 misdemeanor) that meets the criteria for the new offense – possession of a deadly weapon – would now be punishable as a Class G felony. Consequently,

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<sup>4</sup> New, “stand alone” institution built for Expanded Operating Capacity (EOC); single cells are assumed for close custody, and dormitories are assumed for medium and minimum custody (occupancy no greater than 130% of SOC).

“Add-on” facilities (close and medium custody) are built within the perimeter of an existing 1,000-cell Close Security Institution; a minimum custody “add-on” is built adjacent to an existing perimeter. “Add-on” facilities employ the same EOC custody configurations as “stand alone” (i.e. single cells for close custody, and dorms for medium and minimum custody levels).

<sup>5</sup> Impact on incarcerated population is assumed to begin in FY 2008-09, given the effective date of December 1, 2007 and typical lag time between charge and conviction (6 months).

new cases would be elevated to superior court, rather than district court. Such elevation would increase jury involvement, as well as workloads for district attorneys, superior court judges, clerks, court reporters, and indigent defense counsel.

Estimated FY 2007-08 costs for a Class A1 misdemeanor trial and plea are \$4,215 and \$245, respectively. In contrast, estimated costs for a Class G felony trial and plea are \$9,310 and \$520, respectively. Actual court-time costs may vary with time requirements and disposition (i.e. trial or plea); however, the approximate difference in trial cost for this new, enhanced offense is \$5,095. These cost estimates are based on projected court-time requirements for judges, assistant district attorneys, deputy clerks, court reporters, and indigent defense counsel, and therefore represent only partial costs for court proceedings.

**SOURCES OF DATA:** Department of Correction; Judicial Branch; North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; and Office of State Construction.

**TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS:** None

**FISCAL RESEARCH DIVISION:** (919) 733-4910

**PREPARED BY:** Bryce Ball and Denise Thomas

**APPROVED BY:** Lynn Muchmore, Director  
Fiscal Research Division

**DATE:** February 28, 2007



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