Proposition 57

Criminal Sentences. Juvenile Criminal Proceedings and Sentencing. Initiative Constitutional Amendment and Statute.

BACKGROUND

Adult Offenders

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) operates the state prison system. CDCR is responsible for housing adults who have been convicted of felonies identified in state law as serious or violent, as well as certain sex offenses. Examples of violent felonies include murder, robbery, and rape. Examples of serious felonies include certain forms of assault, such as assault with the intent to commit robbery. The department is also responsible for housing individuals convicted of other felonies (such as grand theft) in cases where those individuals have been previously convicted of serious, violent, or certain sex offenses. As of June 2016, there were about 128,000 individuals in state prison. Below, we discuss the sentencing of adult offenders and the use of parole consideration hearings and sentencing credits.

Adult Sentencing. Individuals are placed in prison under an indeterminate sentence or a determinate sentence. Under indeterminate sentencing, individuals are sentenced to prison for a term that includes a minimum but no specific maximum, such as 25-years-to-life. Under determinate sentencing, individuals receive fixed prison terms with a specified release date. Most people in state prison have received a determinate sentence.

Individuals in prison have been convicted of a main or primary offense. They often serve additional time due to other, lesser crimes for which they are convicted at the same time. In addition, state law includes various sentencing enhancements that can increase the amount of

time individuals serve. For example, those previously convicted of a serious or violent offense generally must serve twice the term for any new felony offense.

Parole Consideration Hearings. After an individual serves the minimum number of years required for an indeterminate sentence, the state Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) conducts a parole consideration hearing to determine whether the individual is ready to be released from prison. For example, BPH would conduct such a hearing for an individual sentenced to 25-years-to-life after the individual served 25 years in prison. If BPH decides not to release the individual from prison, the board would conduct a subsequent hearing in the future. Individuals who receive a determinate sentence do not need a parole consideration hearing to be released from prison at the end of their sentence. However, some of these individuals currently are eligible for parole consideration hearings before they have served their entire sentence. For example, certain individuals who have not been convicted of violent felonies are currently eligible for parole consideration after they have served half of their prison sentence. This was one of several measures put in place by a federal court to reduce the state's prison population.

Sentencing Credits. State law currently allows CDCR to award credits under certain conditions to prison inmates that reduce the time they must serve in prison. The credits are provided for good behavior or for participating in work, training, or education programs. Over two-thirds of inmates are eligible to receive credits. State law limits the amount that inmate sentences can be reduced through credits. For example, more than half of inmates eligible for credits can only reduce their sentences by 15 percent because they have a conviction for a violent offense.

Juvenile Justice

Youths accused of committing crimes when they were under 18 years of age are generally tried in juvenile court. However, under certain circumstances, they can be tried in adult court. Below, we discuss the process for determining whether a youth is tried in juvenile court versus adult court.

Youths in Juvenile Court. Juvenile court proceedings are different than adult court proceedings. For example, juvenile court judges do not sentence a youth to a set term in prison or jail. Instead, the judge determines the appropriate placement and rehabilitative treatment (such as drug treatment) for the youth, based on factors such as the youth's offense and criminal history. About 44,000 youths were tried in juvenile court in 2015.

Counties are generally responsible for the youths placed by juvenile courts. Some of these youths are placed in county juvenile facilities. However, if the judge finds that the youth committed certain significant crimes listed in statute (such as murder, robbery, and certain sex offenses), the judge can place the youth in a state juvenile facility. State law requires that counties generally pay a portion of the cost of housing youths in these state facilities. Youths who are released from a state juvenile facility are generally supervised in the community by county probation officers.

Youths in Adult Court. In certain circumstances, youths accused of committing crimes when they were age 14 or older can be tried in adult court and receive adult sentences. (Individuals accused of committing crimes before they were age 14 must have their cases heard in juvenile court.) Such cases can be sent to adult court in one of the three following ways:

- ***Automatically Based on Seriousness of Crime.*** If a youth is accused of committing murder or specific sex offenses with certain special circumstances that make the crime more serious (such as also being accused of torturing the victim), he or she must be tried in adult court.

- ***At the Discretion of Prosecutor Based on Crime and Criminal History.*** If a youth has a significant criminal history and/or is accused of certain crimes listed in statute (such as murder), a prosecutor can file charges directly in adult court. Prosecutors have this ability in more cases for youths who were age 16 or 17 at the time the crime was committed than for those who were age 14 or 15.

- ***At the Discretion of Judge Based on Hearing.*** A prosecutor can request a hearing in which a juvenile court judge decides whether a youth should be transferred to adult court. For youths who were age 14 or 15 when the crime was committed, the crime must be one of certain significant crimes listed in statute (such as murder, robbery, or certain sex offenses). For youths who were age 16 or 17 when the crime was committed, the prosecutor can seek this hearing for any crime, but typically will only do so for more serious crimes or for youths with a significant criminal history.

Relatively few youths are sent to adult court each year. For example, less than 600 youths were sent to adult court in 2015. Less than 100 youths were sent to adult court at the discretion of a judge based on a hearing. The remainder were sent to adult court automatically based on the seriousness of their crime or at the discretion of a prosecutor based on their crime and/or criminal history.

Youths convicted in adult court when they are under 18 years of age are typically held in a state juvenile facility for the first portion of their sentences. When these youths turn age 18, they are generally transferred to state prison. However, if their sentences are short enough that they are able to complete their terms before turning age 21, they serve their entire sentences in a state juvenile facility. The state pays the entire cost of housing youths in a state juvenile facility who were convicted in adult court. After completing their sentences, these youths are generally supervised in the community by state parole agents.

PROPOSAL

This measure makes changes to the State Constitution to increase the number of inmates eligible for parole consideration and authorizes CDCR to award sentencing credits to inmates. The measure also makes changes to state law to require that youths have a hearing in juvenile court before they can be transferred to adult court. We describe these provisions in greater detail below.

Parole Consideration for Nonviolent Offenders. The measure changes the State Constitution to make individuals who are convicted of "nonviolent felony" offenses eligible for parole consideration after serving the full prison term for their primary offense. As a result, BPH would decide whether to release these individuals before they have served any additional time related to other crimes or sentencing enhancements.

The measure requires CDCR to adopt regulations to implement these changes. Although the measure and current law do not specify which felony crimes are defined as nonviolent, this analysis assumes a nonviolent felony offense would include any felony offense that is not specifically defined in statute as violent. As of September 2015, there were about 30,000 individuals in state prison who would be affected by the parole consideration provisions of the measure. In addition, about 7,500 of the individuals admitted to state prison each year would be eligible for parole consideration under the measure. Individuals who would be affected by the above changes currently serve about two years in prison before being considered for parole and/or released. Under the measure, we estimate that these individuals would serve around one and one-half years in prison before being considered for parole and/or released.

Authority to Award Credits. The measure also changes the State Constitution to give CDCR the authority to award credits to inmates for good behavior and approved rehabilitative or educational achievements. The department could award increased credits to those currently eligible for them and

credits to those currently ineligible. As a result, CDCR could increase the amount of credits inmates can earn, which would reduce the amount of time served in prison.

Juvenile Transfer Hearings. The measure changes state law to require that, before youths can be transferred to adult court, they must have a hearing in juvenile court to determine whether they should be transferred. As a result, the only way a youth could be tried in adult court is if the juvenile court judge in the hearing decides to transfer the youth to adult court. Youths accused of committing certain severe crimes would no longer automatically be tried in adult court and no youth could be tried in adult court based only on the decision of a prosecutor. In addition, the measure specifies that prosecutors can only seek transfer hearings for youths accused of (1) committing certain significant crimes listed in state law (such as murder, robbery, and certain sex offenses) when they were age 14 or 15 or (2) committing a felony when they were 16 or 17. As a result of these provisions, there would be fewer youths tried in adult court.

FISCAL EFFECTS

This measure would have various fiscal effects on the state and local governments. However, the magnitude of these effects would depend on how certain provisions in the measure are interpreted and implemented. As such, our estimates below are subject to significant uncertainty.

Parole Consideration for Nonviolent Offenders

Net State Savings. To the extent nonviolent offenders serve shorter prison terms due to the parole consideration provisions of the measure, it would reduce state costs as the size of the prison population would decline. The level of savings would depend heavily on the number of individuals BPH chose to release. Based on recent BPH experience with parole consideration for certain nonviolent offenders, we estimate that the ongoing fiscal impact of this provision would likely be

state savings in the tens of millions of dollars annually. These savings would be offset somewhat by additional costs for BPH to conduct more parole considerations.

The measure would also result in temporary fiscal effects in the near term due to (1) additional savings from the release of offenders currently in prison who would be eligible for parole consideration and (2) an acceleration of parole costs to supervise those individuals who are released from prison earlier than otherwise.

Acceleration of County Costs. Because the measure would result in the early release of some individuals who are supervised by county probation officers following their release from prison, the measure would likely increase the size of the probation population in the near term. In the absence of the measure, counties would have eventually incurred these probation costs in the future.

Sentencing Credits for Prison Inmates

Net State Savings. To the extent CDCR awards individuals with additional credits, the measure would reduce state costs as a result of a lower prison population. Any level of savings is highly uncertain, as it would depend on how much average sentence lengths were reduced by CDCR. If the department granted enough credits to reduce the average time inmates serve by a few weeks, the measure could eventually result in state savings in the low tens of millions of dollars annually. However, the savings could be significantly higher or lower if the department made different decisions. Because the measure could result in the early release of some individuals who are supervised by state parole agents following release, the measure could temporarily increase the size of the parole population. The state, however, would eventually have incurred these parole costs even in the absence of the measure.

Acceleration of County Costs. Because the measure could result in the early release of some individuals who are supervised by county probation officers following their release from prison, the

measure could increase the size of the probation population in the near term. In the absence of the measure, counties would have eventually incurred these probation costs in the future.

Prosecution of Youth in Adult Court

Net State Savings. If the measure's transfer hearing requirements result in fewer youths being tried and convicted in adult court, the measure would have a number of fiscal effects on the state. First, it would reduce state prison and parole costs as those youths would no longer spend any time in prison or be supervised by state parole agents following their release. In addition, because juvenile court proceedings are generally shorter than adult court proceedings, the measure would reduce state court costs. These savings would be partially offset by increased state juvenile justice costs as youths affected by the measure would generally spend a greater amount of time in state juvenile facilities. (As noted earlier, a portion of the cost of housing these youths in state juvenile facilities would be paid for by counties.) In total, we estimate that the net savings to the state from the above effects could be a few million dollars annually.

County Costs. If fewer youths are tried and convicted as adults, the measure would also have a number of fiscal effects on counties. First, as discussed above, counties would be responsible for paying a portion of the costs of housing these youths in state juvenile facilities. In addition, county probation departments would be responsible for supervising these youths following their release. Since juvenile court proceedings are generally shorter than adult court proceedings, the above county costs would be partially offset by some savings. For example, county agencies involved in court proceedings for these youths—such as district attorneys, public defenders, and county probation—would experience a reduction in workload. **In total, we estimate that the net costs to counties due to the above effects would likely be a few million dollars annually.**

Other Fiscal Effects

The measure could also affect crime rates in varying ways. On the one hand, if the measure results in offenders spending less time in prison and more time in the community, it could result in these offenders committing additional crimes or crimes sooner than they otherwise would have. On the other hand, the measure could lead to more offenders participating in educational and rehabilitative programs that reduce the likelihood of them committing crimes in the future. The net effect of the above factors is unknown.