



Fiscal Impact Statement for Proposed Legislation

Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission

Senate Bill 1271 (Patron—Perry)

LD#: 25104285

Date: 1/10/2025

Topic: Threats of death or bodily injury

Fiscal Impact Summary:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Adult Correctional Facilities: \$50,000 * • Local Adult Correctional Facilities: Cannot be determined • Adult Community Corrections Programs: Cannot be determined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile Direct Care: Cannot be determined ** • Juvenile Detention Facilities: Cannot be determined ** <p>** Provided by the Department of Juvenile Justice</p>
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* The estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 2 of the Acts of Assembly of 2024, Special Session I, requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of \$50,000.

Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4, fiscal impact statements prepared by the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission only include the estimated increase in operating costs associated with additional state-responsible prison beds and do not reflect any other costs or savings that may be associated with the proposed legislation.

Summary of Proposed Legislation:

Currently, under § 18.2-60, communicating a threat to kill or do bodily injury in writing, including an electronically transmitted communication producing a visual or electronic message, to a person or a member of that person’s family is a Class 6 felony if it places the person in reasonable fear of death or bodily injury to themselves or a family member.¹ The penalty is the same if the threat is made on school grounds, at a school event, or on a school bus, whether or not the object of the threat is aware of it, so long as the threat would put him in reasonable fear of death or harm. If a person 18 years of age or older communicates a threat with the intent to commit an act of terrorism, the penalty is increased to a Class 5 felony. If a person under the age of 18 commits such an offense, it is a Class 1 misdemeanor. An oral threat made to a health care worker who in the performance of his duties or a school employee is punishable as a Class 1 misdemeanor.

The proposal expands the Class 6 felony defined in § 18.2-60(A), communicating a threat to kill or injure in writing, to include oral threats to kill or injure a person or a member of his family.

The proposal adds language to clarify that an electronically transmitted communication producing a visual or electronic message includes an email, a text message, or a message or post on any social media platform. The clarifying language applies to each of the four felonies and one Class 1 misdemeanor defined in this section.

¹ Under current law, felony offenses under § 18.2-60 (related to threats of death or bodily injury) are eligible for the enhanced sentence credits specified in § 53.1-202.3, whereby individuals must serve a minimum of 67% of the sentence ordered by the court. The proposed legislation does not change the earned sentence credits available to offenders convicted of these felonies.

Analysis:

The number of individuals who would be convicted of a Class 6 felony § 18.2-60(A) for making oral threats to kill or injure is unknown. It is unclear how many individuals would be affected by the clarifying language as to what constitutes a visual or electronic message.

According to the Circuit Court Case Management System (CMS) for fiscal year (FY) 2023 and FY2024, 145 offenders were convicted of Class 6 felonies under §§ 18.2-60(A,1) or 18.2-60(A,2) for communicating threats. This was the primary, or most serious, offense for 117 offenders. Of these, 25.6% received a state-responsible (prison) sentence with a median sentence of 2.0 years. Another 47% received a local-responsible (jail) term for which the median sentence was 6.0 months. The remaining 27.4% of offenders did not receive an active term of incarceration to serve after sentencing.

Impact of Proposed Legislation:

State adult correctional facilities. The proposal expands an existing Class 6 felony and clarifies language in § 18.2-60 applicable to multiple felony offenses. The net effect on the number of convicted individuals and associated sentencing patterns cannot be estimated; therefore, the net impact on future state-responsible (prison) bed space needs cannot be determined.

Local adult correctional facilities. Similarly, the proposal may increase local-responsible (jail) bed space needs; however, the magnitude of the impact cannot be quantified.

Adult community corrections programs. The potential impact on community corrections resources cannot be estimated.

Virginia’s Sentencing Guidelines. While the Sentencing Guidelines cover the Class 6 felony under § 18.2-60(A,1), the Guidelines do not apply to the other felonies in this section when the conviction is the primary, or most serious, offense at sentencing. However, such convictions may augment the Guidelines recommendation (as additional offenses) if the most serious offense at sentencing is covered by the Guidelines. Any felonies under § 18.2-60 are currently not defined as violent under § 17.1-805(C) for Guidelines purposes. No adjustment to the Guidelines would be necessary under the proposal.

Juvenile direct care. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice, the impact of the proposal on direct care (juvenile correctional center or alternative commitment placement) bed space needs cannot be determined.

Juvenile detention facilities. The Department of Juvenile Justice reports that the proposal’s impact on the bed space needs of juvenile detention facilities cannot be determined.

Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4, the estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 2 of the Acts of Assembly of 2024, Special Session I, requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of \$50,000.

Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4, the estimated amount of the necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of commitment to the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice.