

Measure H311

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please carefully read the following description of a ballot measure that was written by a disinterested expert. Feel free to take notes or outline passages as you read.

This measure is quite long and may take as long as 15 minutes to read.

BALLOT MEASURE H311

OVERVIEW

This measure makes various changes to laws specifically related to the treatment of juvenile offenders. In addition, it changes laws for juveniles and adults who are gang-related offenders, and those who commit violent and serious crimes. Specifically, it:

- Requires more juvenile offenders to be tried in adult court.
- Requires that certain juvenile offenders be held in local or state correctional facilities.
- Changes the types of probation available for juvenile felons.
- Reduces confidentiality protections for juvenile offenders.
- Increases penalties for gang-related crimes and requires convicted gang members to register with local law enforcement agencies.
- Increases criminal penalties for certain serious and violent offenses.

The most significant changes and their fiscal effects are discussed below.

Prosecution of Juveniles in Adult Court

Background. Currently, a minor 14 years of age or older can be tried as an adult for certain offenses. Generally, in order for this to occur, the prosecutor must file a petition with the juvenile court asking the court to transfer the juvenile to adult court for prosecution. The juvenile court then holds a hearing to determine whether the minor should be transferred. However, if an offender is 14 years of age or older, has previously committed a felony, and is accused of committing one of a specified list of violent crimes, then that offender must be prosecuted in adult court.

Proposal. This measure changes the procedures under which juveniles are transferred from juvenile court to adult court. Juveniles 14 years of age or older charged with committing certain types of murder or a serious sex offense generally would no longer be eligible for juvenile court and would have to be tried in adult court. In addition, prosecutors would be allowed to directly file charges against juvenile offenders in adult court under a variety of circumstances without first obtaining permission of the juvenile court.

Juvenile Incarceration and Detention

Background. Under existing law, probation departments generally can decide whether a juvenile arrested for a crime can be released or should be detained in juvenile hall pending action by the court. These determinations generally are based on whether there is space in the juvenile hall and the severity of the crime. The main exception concerns offenses involving the personal use or possession of a firearm, in which case the offender must be detained until he or she can be brought before a judge. Most juveniles detained in juvenile halls for a long time are awaiting court action for very serious or violent offenses.

If, after a hearing, a court declares a juvenile offender a delinquent (similar to a conviction in adult court), the court in consultation with the probation department, will decide where to place the juvenile. Generally, those options range from probation within the community to placement in a county juvenile detention facility or placement with the California Youth Authority (CYA).

For juveniles tried as adults, the adult criminal court can generally, depending on the circumstances, commit the juvenile to the jurisdiction of either the CYA or the California Department of Corrections (CDC). In addition, juvenile offenders convicted in adult court who were not transferred there by the juvenile court can petition the adult court to be returned to juvenile court for a juvenile court sanction, such as probation or commitment to a local juvenile detention facility.

Because current law prohibits housing juveniles with adult inmates or detainees, any juvenile housed in an adult jail or prison must be kept separate from the adults. As a result, most juveniles--even those who have been tried in adult court or are awaiting action by the court--are housed in a juvenile facility such as the juvenile hall or the CYA until they reach the age of 18.

Proposal. Under this measure probation departments would no longer have the discretion to determine if juveniles arrested for any one of more than 30 specific serious or violent crimes should be released or detained until they can be brought before a judge. Rather, such detention would be required under this measure. In addition, the measure requires the juvenile court to commit certain offenders declared delinquent by the court to a secure facility (such as a juvenile hall, ranch or camp, or CYA). It also requires that any juvenile 16 years of age or older who is convicted in adult court must be sentenced to CDC instead of CYA.

Changes in Juvenile Probation

Background. Statewide there are more than 100,000 juvenile offenders annually on probation. Most are on "formal" probation, while the remainder are on "informal" probation. Under formal probation, a juvenile has been found by a court to be a delinquent, while under informal probation there has been no such finding. In most informal probation cases, no court hearing has been held because the probation department can directly impose this type of sanction. If the juvenile successfully completes the informal probation, he or she will have no record of a juvenile crime.

Proposal. This measure generally prohibits the use of informal probation for any juvenile offender who commits a felony. Instead, it requires that these offenders appear in court, but allows the court to impose a newly created sanction called "deferred entry of judgment." Like informal probation, this sanction would result in the dismissal of charges if an offender successfully completes the term of probation.

Juvenile Record Confidentiality and Criminal History

Background. Current law protects the confidentiality of criminal record information on juvenile offenders. However, such protections are more limited for juvenile felons and those juveniles charged with serious felonies.

Proposal. This measure reduces confidentiality protections for juvenile suspects and offenders by:

- Barring the sealing or destruction of a juvenile offense record for any minor 14 years of age or older who has committed a serious or violent offense, instead of requiring them to wait six years from when the crime was committed as provided under current law.
- Allowing law enforcement agencies the discretion to disclose the name of a juvenile charged with a serious felony at the time of arrest, instead of requiring them to wait until a charge has been filed as under current law.
- Providing law enforcement agencies with the discretion to release the name of a juvenile suspect alleged to have committed a violent offense whenever release of the information would assist in apprehending the minor and protecting public safety, instead of requiring a court order as under current law.

In addition, this measure requires the California Department of Justice (DOJ) to maintain complete records of the criminal histories for all juvenile felons, not just those who have committed serious or violent felonies.

Gang Provisions

Background. Current law generally defines "gangs" as any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of certain crimes. Under current law, anyone convicted of a gang-related crime can receive an extra prison term of one, two, or three years.

Proposal. This measure increases the extra prison terms for gang-related crimes to two, three, or four years, unless they are serious or violent crimes in which case the new extra prison terms would be five and ten years, respectively. In addition, this measure adds gang-related murder to the list of "special circumstances" that make offenders eligible for the death penalty. It also makes it easier to prosecute crimes related to gang recruitment, expands the law on conspiracy to include gang-related activities, allows wider use of "wiretaps" against known or suspected gang members, and requires anyone convicted of a gang-related offense to register with local law enforcement agencies.

Serious and Violent Felony Offenses

Background. Under current law, anyone convicted of a serious or violent offense is subject to a longer prison sentence, restrictive bail and probation rules, and certain prohibitions on plea bargaining. The "Three Strikes and You're Out" law provides longer prison sentences for new offenses committed by persons previously convicted of a violent or serious offense. In addition, persons convicted of violent offenses must serve at least 85 percent of their sentence before they can be released (most offenders must serve at least 50 percent of their sentence).

Proposal. This measure revises the lists of specific crimes defined as serious or violent offenses, thus making most of them subject to the longer sentence provisions of existing law related to serious and violent offenses. In addition, these crimes would count as "strikes" under the Three Strikes law.



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