

FISCAL NOTE

ASSEMBLY, No. 4897

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

DATED: AUGUST 11, 2026

SUMMARY

Synopsis: Establishes “New Jersey Holistic Representation Model” in Office of Public Defender.

Type of Impact: Countervailing annual State expenditure impacts.

Agencies Affected: Office of the Public Defender; the Judiciary; Department of Corrections; State Parole Board.

Executive Estimate

Fiscal Impact	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
State Expenditure Increase (Additional Positions)	\$6.3 million	\$5.5 million	\$5.8 million
Potential State Expenditure Decrease (Incarceration Avoidance)	Indeterminate	Indeterminate	Indeterminate

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
State Expenditure Increase (Additional Positions)	\$9.8 million	\$9.1 million	\$9.5 million
Potential State Expenditure Decrease (Incarceration Avoidance)	Indeterminate	Indeterminate	Indeterminate

- The Office of the Public Defender estimates that establishing the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model would increase State costs by \$6.3 million in the first year following enactment, \$5.5 million in the second year, and \$5.8 million in the third year, mostly due to salary expenditures attributed to the creation of 67 new positions.
- The Office of the Public Defender also estimates that the bill would result in indeterminate State savings to the extent that the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model reduces the incidence of recidivism, reincarceration, and repeat involvement in the criminal justice system.
- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) largely agrees with this estimate but adds the cost of employee fringe benefits to the cost projection. Once fringe benefit costs are included, the

OLS estimate totals \$9.8 million in additional State expenditures in the first year, \$9.1 million in the second year, and \$9.5 million in the third year.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill would establish the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model in the Office of the Public Defender as a Statewide program for indigent individuals involved in the criminal justice system. The model currently operates in the Hudson, Atlantic, and Monmouth regional offices.

Participation in the holistic representation model would be voluntary and subject to eligibility criteria to be determined by the Office of the Public Defender. The model consists of legal representation by a staff attorney and social support services provided by professionals who work with clients of the Office of the Public Defender to address underlying social, economic, and mental health challenges contributing to the client's involvement in the criminal justice system.

Specifically, the non-attorney members of the interdisciplinary client team would conduct assessments and connect client participants with social services, programs and resources, including mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, housing support, and job training.

The bill would also require the Office of the Public Defender to develop or approve a training course and curriculum for public defender staff on trauma-based approaches and collaborative defense practices and make the curriculum available to all regional offices. The training course and curriculum would have to be reviewed at least every two years and modified as needed. All public defender staff would have to complete the in-service training triennially.

The Public Defender would also be required to produce an annual report on the outcomes and performance of the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Office of the Public Defender estimates that the bill would increase State expenditures by \$6.3 million in the first fiscal year following enactment, \$5.5 million in the second fiscal year, and \$5.8 million in the third fiscal year. Expenditures would be higher in the first year due to one-time start-up costs such as the purchase of IT equipment and vehicles.

The estimated amounts primarily reflect salary costs for 67 new positions as the holistic representation model expands Statewide: \$5.1 million in salary costs in the first year, \$5.3 million in the second year, and \$5.5 million in the third year. The positions are composed of five Supervising Family Services Specialists, 40 Family Service Specialists, and 22 Family Service Specialist Trainees.

The office indicated that if full funding is not available for 67 new positions in the first year of implementation, the new staff could instead be phased in over a three-year period.

The Office of the Public Defender also estimated that the bill would result in State savings from incarceration avoidance. The office did not quantify the savings but provided an illustrative example. If, of the 60,000 cases the office handles annually, holistic representation were provided in five percent of those cases (3,000 clients) and ten percent of those clients (300 individuals) avoided incarceration (an estimated \$75,000 annual State cost) as a result of the services provided, the State would save an estimated \$22.5 million annually.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS largely agrees with the Office of the Public Defender's estimate of the cost of establishing the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model but concludes that the costs of employee fringe benefits for the 67 new positions would have to be added. Once fringe benefit costs are included, the OLS estimate totals \$9.8 million in additional State expenditures in the first year following enactment, \$9.1 million in the second year, and \$9.5 million in the third year.

The OLS notes that, after the initial implementation period, there would also be indeterminate annual State cost savings to the extent that the New Jersey Holistic Representation Model reduces the incidence of recidivism, reincarceration, and repeat involvement in the criminal justice system.

Section: Judiciary

Analyst: Emely D. Ramirez
Associate Research Analyst

Approved: Thomas Koenig
Legislative Budget and Finance Officer

This fiscal note has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67 (C.52:13B-6 et seq.).