

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 5040

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
222nd LEGISLATURE

DATED: SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

SUMMARY

- Synopsis:

Establishes Hope Card Program to provide victims of domestic violence with restraining order quick reference wallet card; makes appropriation.
- Type of Impact:

Annual State and local cost increases; potential annual State revenue increase.
- Agencies Affected:

Department of Law and Public Safety; local government; the Judiciary; Department of Corrections; State Parole Board.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	Annual
State Cost Increase	Indeterminate
Local Cost Increase	Indeterminate
Potential State Revenue Increase	Indeterminate

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) finds that the provision of an optional domestic violence restraining order quick reference wallet card to victims of domestic violence who receive a final restraining order will increase annual State and local expenditures. The OLS lacks sufficient information to quantify the fiscal impact, as it is not possible to know how many domestic violence victims will request a restraining order quick reference wallet card.
- The following State and local agencies would incur expenditure increases: a) Department of Law and Public Safety would incur additional costs associated with implementation, guidance, and training activities; b) municipal police and courts would incur additional costs to train law enforcement personnel and integrate Hope Card verification procedures into existing domestic violence enforcement operations; and c) the Judiciary would incur costs to establish and administer the Hope Card Program, including design, information technology modifications, card production, personnel, and training expenses.
- The OLS does not have sufficient information on the potential increase in the number of arrests, convictions, and terms of imprisonment resulting from the bill’s provisions on the



establishment of a new crime of the fourth degree of theft, defacement, alteration, or falsification of a Hope Card and, therefore, is unable to estimate the costs to the State. Based on information provided by the Department of Corrections, the FY 2026 projected average annual cost for housing, ensuring security, and providing services to an incarcerated individual was \$78,848, whereas the average daily cost was \$216.

- The OLS notes the State may receive indeterminate revenue from fines imposed on individuals convicted of theft, defacement, alteration, or falsification of a Hope Card by a defendant who is the subject of a restraining order. However, the State's ability to collect criminal fines and penalties has historically been limited.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill establishes the Hope Card Program in New Jersey. Under the bill, a victim of domestic violence who obtains a final restraining order may request a Hope Card from the court at no cost. The Administrative Office of the Courts is authorized to develop the Hope Card as either a laminated, durable, plastic, wallet-sized card or a secure electronic record accessible through a mobile device, website, application, or other technology. A Hope Card must contain, to the extent possible, essential information about the restraining order as enumerated in the bill.

The bill permits a Hope Card to identify all protected persons covered by the order, including a protected child or children, and allows a parent or guardian with custody of a protected child or children to request a Hope Card identifying those protected persons.

Under the bill, a law enforcement officer presented with a Hope Card must verify the information with the State's domestic violence central registry as part of any domestic violence investigation. The bill provides that a person who is issued a Hope Card is exempt from the confidentiality restrictions that would otherwise apply to information from the domestic violence central registry. However, the bill requires any person who receives information contained on a Hope Card to take all reasonable measures to preserve confidentiality. The bill also provides that the Administrative Office of the Courts must consult with the State Domestic Violence Working Group and other knowledgeable persons or organizations concerning the design of the card. The bill further requires the Office of the Attorney General and the Administrative Office of the Courts to incorporate information on the Hope Card Program into their respective existing domestic violence training programs.

The bill additionally provides that theft, defacement, alteration, or falsification of a Hope Card by the defendant subject to the restraining order is deemed contempt of court in the fourth degree. A crime of the fourth degree is punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to 18 months, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Finally, the bill provides for an annual appropriation to the Judiciary for the implementation of the program.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

None received.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS concludes that the provision of an optional domestic violence restraining order quick reference wallet card to victims of domestic violence who receive a final restraining order will increase annual State and local expenditures. The OLS lacks sufficient information to quantify the fiscal impact, as it is not possible to know how many domestic violence victims will request a restraining order quick reference wallet card, also known as a Hope Card.

The following State and local agencies would likely incur expenditure increases: a) Department of Law and Public Safety would incur additional costs associated with implementation, guidance, and training activities; b) municipal police and courts would incur additional costs to train law enforcement personnel and integrate Hope Card verification procedures into existing domestic violence enforcement operations; and c) the Judiciary would incur costs to establish and administer the Hope Card Program, including information technology modifications, card production, personnel, and training expenses.

According to the Judiciary's response to an FY 2027 OLS Discussion Point question, the number of restraining order requests increased from 35,166 in calendar year 2021 to 39,651 in calendar year 2024. During this period, temporary restraining orders issued increased from 30,657 to 33,679, while final restraining orders issued increased from 4,253 to 4,860. As mentioned above, the Administrative Office of the Courts, under the Judiciary, will likely incur one-time costs for information technology enhancements to establish the Hope Card Program and ongoing costs to administer the Hope Card Program, such as application processing and program administration, card production and distribution expenses, training, and other administrative activities necessary to implement the bill's provisions, at no cost to Hope Card recipients.

The bill establishes a crime of the fourth degree for a defendant subject to a restraining order for the theft, defacement, alteration, or falsification of a Hope Card. The OLS does not have sufficient information on the potential increase in the number of arrests, convictions, terms of imprisonment, if any, and parolees to be supervised upon release, resulting from the bill's provisions and, therefore, is unable to estimate the annual costs to the State.

Generally, crimes of the fourth degree carry a presumption of non-incarceration for first time offenders. However, the OLS finds that to the extent that the bill will result in additional incarcerations, based on information provided by the Department of Corrections, the FY 2026 average annual cost for housing, ensuring security, and providing services to an incarcerated individual was \$78,848, whereas the average daily cost was \$216. According to the State Parole Board, the annual average marginal cost to supervise one additional parolee is estimated at \$4,002 for FY 2026. The average cost per parolee, with all overhead costs included, is estimated at \$6,884 for FY 2026.

Lastly, the OLS notes the State may receive indeterminate revenue from fines imposed on individuals convicted of theft, defacement, alteration, or falsification of a Hope Card by a defendant who is the subject of a restraining order. However, the State's ability to collect criminal fines and penalties has historically been limited.

Section: Judiciary
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This legislative fiscal estimate has been produced by the Office of Legislative Services due to the failure of the Executive Branch to respond to our request for a fiscal note.

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