

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 5040

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: OCTOBER 22, 2026

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 5040 (1R).

As amended, 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 (AOC) 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 as approved by AOC. A Hope Card must contain essential information about the restraining order, including the:

- Court of issuance;
- Date of issuance;
- Case number;
- Identifying information and characteristics of the defendant;
- Terms of the restraining order, including any firearms restrictions;
- Names of all persons protected by the restraining order.

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 must take all reasonable measures to preserve confidentiality. The bill also provides that AOC 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 Attorney General and AOC to incorporate information on the Hope Card Program into their respective existing domestic violence training programs.

The bill additionally provides that theft, defacement, or alteration 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.

As amended and reported, the bill provides for an appropriation in the first year of the bill's enactment to the Judiciary for the implementation of the program and requires the State to appropriate monies to support the implementation of the bill in future years.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- 1) clarify that the bill appropriates in the first year of enactment of the bill monies to support the program's implementation;
- 2) clarify that the bill requires the State to appropriate monies to support the implementation of the program in future years; and
- 3) change the title to reflect the amendments to the bill.

FISCAL IMPACT:

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.