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**REPORT ON LEGISLATION BY
THE CRIMINAL COURTS COMMITTEE AND
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

A.4881

S.4294

M. of A. Crespo

Sen. Alcantara

AN ACT to amend the penal law, in relation to reducing certain sentences of imprisonment for misdemeanors to three hundred sixty-four days

One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act

THIS BILL IS APPROVED

On behalf of the New York City Bar Association’s Criminal Courts Committee and Criminal Justice Operations Committee, we write to express our support for the One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act (“the Act”), a piece of legislation that would help ensure fairness, transparency, and proportionality for noncitizen New Yorkers in our criminal courts. Furthermore the Act will improve the efficiency and functioning of the New York criminal justice system.

OVERVIEW

The One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act will amend New York’s current criminal sentencing laws with respect to A misdemeanors by reducing the maximum potential sentence by one day. Currently, the maximum potential sentence for an A misdemeanor “shall not exceed one year.”¹ The Act would change this part of the Penal Law such that A misdemeanors instead would be punishable by a maximum of 364 days. Additionally, the Act would amend any other sections of the New York code that set forth any unclassified misdemeanor punishable by one year by reducing the maximum sentence for all such misdemeanors to 364 days.

The Act also would apply retroactively to reduce, by one day, the maximum sentence for anyone previously convicted of an A misdemeanor and sentenced to one year. Furthermore, with regard to the retroactivity section, the Act is drafted prudently so as not to burden the criminal justice system, courts, prosecutors or defense attorneys with the need for any additional judicial

¹ N.Y Penal Law § 70.15.

process. The retroactivity provisions are intended to work automatically by operation of law and a person so sentenced need only request from the court a certificate of conviction setting forth the 364 day sentence.

THE ONE DAY TO PROTECT NEW YORKERS ACT WOULD PROTECT IMMIGRANT NEW YORKERS, CONVICTED OF A MISDEMEANORS, FROM UNDULY HARSH AND INADVERTENT CONSEQUENCES

Due to some idiosyncrasies in the drafting of federal immigration laws, New York’s one year maximum sentence for A misdemeanors has extraordinary, harsh, and disproportionate consequences for immigrant New Yorkers—including lawfully present permanent residents (green card holders), asylees, and victims of domestic violence. There are three fundamental ways in which this can happen. They are explained briefly below, and each of these issues would be addressed by the one day reduction in the maximum sentence that the Act envisions.

First, federal law can subject an individual to deportation for a single conviction for a “crime involving moral turpitude . . . [if a] *sentence of one year or longer may be imposed.*”² Notably, it is the *potential* for the one year sentence that is critical here, even in circumstances where a person is not subject to any incarceration whatsoever. “Crimes involving moral turpitude” is an extremely broad category of offenses that includes some of the most minor crimes in the New York Penal Law, including, for example, turnstile jumping, N.Y.P.L. § 165.15, and minor shoplifting offenses, N.Y.P.L. § 155.25.³ In practice, this means even individuals who entered the United States legally and have a green card could be detained and placed in deportation proceedings if they are convicted of a minor theft offense and are never sentenced to even one day in jail. Additionally, because there is no statute of limitations in immigration law,⁴ someone who came legally as a child and was convicted of an A misdemeanor as a teenager could be deported decades later based upon this single conviction, regardless of whether this individual had any subsequent contact with the criminal justice system.

An *actual* one year jail sentence for certain A misdemeanors serves to disqualify some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers from special protections that would otherwise be available to them under federal immigration law. Specifically, federal immigration law provides for asylum protection for people who have a well-founded fear of persecution in the countries from which they fled.⁵ Similarly, federal immigration law provides for special protections for certain victims of domestic violence.⁶ However, these protections generally become unavailable if the

² Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) § 237(a)(2)(A)(i) (emphasis added).

³ See *Matter of De La Nues*, 18 I. & N. Dec. 140, 145 (BIA 1981) (all theft offenses, no matter how trivial, are usually considered to be crimes involving moral turpitude).

⁴ See *Restrepo v. Attorney General*, 617 F.3d 787, 801 (3d Cir. 2010) (holding that the federal civil statute of limitations provision at 28 U.S.C. 2462 does not apply to immigration removal proceedings because the Immigration and Nationality Act does not itself include any express statute of limitation provision)

⁵ See generally INA § 208 (asylum provisions).

⁶ See generally INA §§ 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)-(vii), 240A(b)(2)(A) (Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provisions).

individual has been convicted of an “aggravated felony.”⁷ However, because of the one-year maximum sentence for A misdemeanors in New York, certain New York misdemeanor convictions can be considered “aggravated felonies” under federal immigration law if an individual is actually sentenced to one year.⁸ It is unlikely that Congress intended to deny protections to these vulnerable groups based upon a single misdemeanor conviction, but that is exactly what happens under current law. By reducing the maximum sentence for A misdemeanors to 364 days, New York can ensure that its most vulnerable population will not be disqualified from these vital protections based on this interplay between federal immigration law and New York penal law.

Second, the one day reduction in the maximum sentence for A misdemeanors in New York would mitigate the disproportionate consequences that can arise from a single minor conviction. It would also bring New York in line with the ten other states that punish all misdemeanors with maximum sentences of less than one year.⁹ Notably, multiple misdemeanor convictions, or a single felony conviction, for crimes involving moral turpitude would still trigger deportation,¹⁰ as would single misdemeanor convictions for certain other categories of offenses.¹¹ This Act would not change the operation of those provisions of law in any way.

Thirdly, the *actual* one year maximum sentence for certain A misdemeanors divests immigration judges of the discretion they would otherwise have under federal immigration law to consider the totality of the circumstances in a given case. A judge could usually use this discretion in making determinations, for example, of whether or not to deport a non-citizen who has been a long-term resident and has close ties to his community in the United States. Historically, when such non-citizens faced deportation, immigration judges generally had broad

⁷ See INA § 101(f)(8) (barring anyone with an aggravated felony from establishing good moral character); INA § 204(a)(1)(A)(iii)(II)(bb) (requiring good moral character to adjust status under VAWA); INA § 208(b)(2)(B)(i) (barring anyone with an aggravated felony from receiving asylum protection).

⁸ See, e.g., INA 101(a)(43)(F), (G) (setting forth aggravated felony grounds that are triggered by a one year sentence).

⁹ See Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13-707; Cal. Penal Code § 18.5; 720 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/2-11; N.J. Stat. Ann. § 2C:43-8; N.M. Stat. Ann. § 30-1-6; N.C. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 15A-1340.23; Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 2929.21; Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-35-111; Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9A.20.021; Wis. Stat. Ann. § 939.51. Three of these states have recently enacted this change for exactly the reasons for which this Act is being advanced. See Robert Reeves, *California Misdemeanor Maximum Penalty Reduction from 365 to 364 Days Brings Relief to Some Noncitizens*, ASIAN J. (Aug. 7, 2014), available at <http://asianjournal.com/immigration/california-misdemeanor-maximum-penalty-reduction-from-365-to-364-days-brings-relief-to-some-noncitizens/>; Kristi Pihl, *Measure Reduces Misdemeanor Sentence by 1 Day*, THE SEATTLE TIMES (Apr. 24, 2011), available at <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/measure-reduces-misdemeanor-sentence-by-1-day/>; Daniel M. Kowalski, *Nevada Gross Misdemeanor Statute Modified to 364 Days*, (June 4, 2013), available at <https://www.lexisnexis.com/legalnewsroom/immigration/b/insideneews/archive/2013/06/28/nevada-gross-misdemeanor-statute-modified-to-364-days.aspx?Redirected=true> (last visited March 15, 2017).

¹⁰ INA § 237(a)(2)(A)(i), (ii) (establishing deportability for crimes involving moral turpitude).

¹¹ See, e.g., INA § 237(a)(2)(B) (deportable for a single controlled substance conviction), INA § 237(a)(2)(C) (deportable for a single firearm conviction), INA § 237(a)(2)(E) (deportable for a single domestic violence conviction), INA § 237(a)(2)(A)(iii) (deportable for a single aggravated felony conviction (some New York misdemeanors, such as Criminal Sale of Marijuana, NYPL §§ 221.35, 221.40, are routinely charged as aggravated felonies)).

discretion to consider the totality of the circumstances—weighing negative equities, like convictions, against positive equities, like rehabilitation, family ties, military service, etc.—to determine whether or not deportation was warranted.¹² However, in 1996, Congress sharply constrained immigration judges’ discretion in this regard, subjecting many non-citizens to mandatory deportation.¹³ As with asylum and VAWA protections, any permanent resident with an “aggravated felony” conviction is now subject to mandatory deportation and an immigration judge is powerless to consider the individual circumstances of the case.¹⁴ Similarly non-permanent residents, who might otherwise qualify for cancellation of removal due to their long-term residence and family ties in the United States, along with other positive equities, will be barred from such relief if they are convicted for an aggravated felony or a single “crime involving moral turpitude” under immigration laws.¹⁵

For the same reasons described above, the one year maximum sentence for A misdemeanors allows some misdemeanor convictions in New York, including some convictions for crimes like petit larceny, NYPL § 155.25, to be classified as aggravated felonies and thus to divest immigration judges of any discretion.¹⁶ As a practical matter, this means, for example, that someone who came here legally, who has lived here for decades with a green card, who served in the U.S. military, who supports her spouse and children, and who may not have set foot in her country of origin since childhood, can still be subjected to mandatory deportation based upon a single misdemeanor conviction that occurred decades earlier, when she was a teenager. By reducing the maximum sentence for A misdemeanors to 364 days, New York can ensure that immigration judges will have discretion to consider circumstances like these when deciding whether or not to deport an entrenched member of the New York community for a misdemeanor conviction.

THE IMPACT OF THE ONE DAY TO PROTECT NEW YORKERS ACT ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act will serve to make the New York criminal justice system more efficient and fair. In 2013, 91,652 people were convicted of A misdemeanors in New York State.¹⁷ Of these convictions, 40% did not result in *any* sentence of incarceration, and only 4% resulted in the maximum sentence of one year, with virtually no one actually serving the full year.¹⁸ While no data is kept regarding the immigration status of defendants by DCJS, by extrapolating from data about the percentage of non-citizens in New York generally, we conclude that thousands of non-citizen New Yorkers are convicted of A misdemeanors each year, and thus thousands could be affected by this change in the law.

¹² See INA 212(c), *repealed by* Sec. 304(b) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-208, 110 Stat. 3009.

¹³ See *id.*

¹⁴ See INA § 240A(a)(3).

¹⁵ See INA § 240A(b)(1)(C); INA §§ 237(a)(2)(A)(ii)-(iii).

¹⁶ See INA § 101(a)(43)(G) (classifying any theft offense with a one year sentence imposed as an aggravated felony).

¹⁷ See Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) data (available on file).

¹⁸ See *id.*

Apart from mitigating the harsh and disproportionate consequences of misdemeanor convictions on non-citizens, this Act will also improve the functioning of our criminal justice system. Specifically, it will improve the process of negotiating pleas between prosecutors and defense attorneys, which would, in turn, be beneficial for the efficacy of the courts. Under current law, the Sixth Amendment's requirement of effective assistance of counsel mandates that an attorney provide a noncitizen with accurate advice concerning the potential immigration consequences of a contemplated guilty plea.¹⁹

Following *Padilla*, plea negotiations have become more complicated. Defendants, now aware of the negative immigration consequences of a given conviction, are often unwilling to take a plea that might otherwise seem like a good outcome to all parties. In these cases, defendants may rather prolong negotiations or take a gamble and face trial rather than accept a plea that is likely to get them deported. By eliminating many of the disproportionate immigration consequences that can flow from minor convictions, the One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act will simplify plea negotiations and thereby improve the overall efficiency of our system for courts, prosecutors, defense attorneys and defendants.

In addition, the change in law would likely reduce the number of motions to vacate judgments filed by non-citizens due to ineffective assistance of counsel under *Padilla* because they were not warned of the immigration consequences of these pleas.²⁰ The ineffective assistance of counsel argument also applies to applicants who were affirmatively misadvised regarding their immigration consequences when pleading guilty to criminal charges.²¹ Rather than responding to these motions, courts and prosecutors will better be able to focus their resources on other priorities.

PASSING THE ONE DAY TO PROTECT NEW YORKERS ACT IS TIMELY AND JUSTIFIED

It is the ideal time for New York to enact this legislation, and join with the other ten states that have taken action to protect their respective immigrant communities through similar reductions to their misdemeanor sentencing statutes.²² These states recognized that their vital immigrant populations were being harmed by the interaction between their criminal law and federal immigration laws, and took action to protect these communities.²³

¹⁹ *Padilla v. Kentucky*, 559 U.S. 356 (2010).

²⁰ See N.Y. CRIM PRO LAW § 440.10 (McKinney 2015).

²¹ See *People v. McDonald*, 1 N.Y.3d 109 (N.Y. 2003); see also *U.S. v. Couto*, 311 F.3d 179, 188 (2d Cir. 2002) (affirmative misrepresentation by counsel as to the deportation consequences of a guilty plea constitutes ineffective assistance).

²² See Reeves, *supra* note 1; Pihl, *supra* note 1; Kowlaski, *supra* note 1.

²³ See *id.* (all three articles).

CONCLUSION

Other immigrant-rich states across the country have reacted to the concerns presented by the interaction between federal immigration laws and local penal laws by reducing their maximum misdemeanor sentences to 364 days. By passing the One Day to Protect New Yorkers Act, New York would join these states in protecting its vital immigrant communities and ensuring that families are not torn apart as a consequence of a technicality in the interaction between federal and local criminal law. Furthermore, this Act would also improve the efficiency of the New York criminal justice system.

For the foregoing reasons, we respectfully ask the Legislature to consider our request to pass this Act.

Criminal Courts Committee
Kerry Ward, Chair

Criminal Justice Operations Committee
Risa Gerson, Chair

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