

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2018 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 549

BY SENATORS JEFFRIES, BALDWIN, BEACH, DRENNAN,
FACEMIRE, GAUNCH, OJEDA, PLYMALE, PREZIOSO,
ROMANO, SMITH, STOLLINGS, SWOPE, TRUMP, AND CLINE

[Introduced February 15, 2018; Referred
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §61-5-27 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
 2 to creating a new felony offense of intimidation or harassment of a public officer, juror, or
 3 witness where the conduct causes injury or loss to person or property; and setting
 4 penalties for the offense.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 5. CRIMES AGAINST PUBLIC JUSTICE.

§61-5-27. Intimidation of and retaliation against public officers and employees, jurors and witnesses; fraudulent official proceedings and legal processes against public officials and employees; penalties.

1 (a) *Definitions.* -- As used in this section:

2 ~~(1)~~ "Fraudulent" means not legally issued or sanctioned under the laws of this state or of
 3 the United States, including forged, false and materially misstated;

4 ~~(2)~~ "Legal process" means an action, appeal, document instrument or other writing issued,
 5 filed or recorded to pursue a claim against person or property, exercise jurisdiction, enforce a
 6 judgment, fine a person, put a lien on property, authorize a search and seizure, arrest a person,
 7 incarcerate a person or direct a person to appear, perform or refrain from performing a specified
 8 act. "Legal process" includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, decree, demand, indictment,
 9 injunction, judgment, lien, motion, notice, order, petition, pleading, sentence, subpoena,
 10 summons, warrant or writ;

11 ~~(3)~~ "Official proceeding" means a proceeding involving a legal process or other process of
 12 a tribunal of this state or of the United States;

13 ~~(4)~~ "Person" means an individual, group, association, corporation or any other entity;

14 ~~(5)~~ "Public official or employee" means an elected or appointed official or employee, of a
 15 state or federal court, commission, department, agency, political subdivision or any governmental
 16 instrumentality;

17 ~~(6)~~ "Recorder" means a clerk or other employee in charge of recording instruments in a

18 court, commission or other tribunal of this state or of the United States; and

19 ~~(7)~~ "Tribunal" means a court or other judicial or quasi-judicial entity, or an administrative,
20 legislative or executive body, or that of a political subdivision, created or authorized under the
21 constitution or laws of this state or of the United States.

22 (b) *Intimidation; harassment.* -- It is unlawful for a person to use intimidation, physical
23 force, harassment or a fraudulent legal process or official proceeding, or to threaten to do so
24 where such threat is directed at inciting or producing imminent lawless action of a violent nature
25 that could cause bodily harm and is likely to incite or produce such action or to attempt to do so,
26 with the intent to:

27 (1) Impede or obstruct a public official or employee from performing his or her official
28 duties;

29 (2) Impede or obstruct a juror or witness from performing his or her official duties in an
30 official proceeding;

31 (3) Influence, delay or prevent the testimony of any person in an official proceeding; or

32 (4) Cause or induce a person to: (A) Withhold testimony, or withhold a record, document
33 or other object from an official proceeding; (B) alter, destroy, mutilate or conceal a record,
34 document or other object impairing its integrity or availability for use in an official proceeding; (C)
35 evade an official proceeding summoning a person to appear as a witness or produce a record,
36 document or other object for an official proceeding; or (D) be absent from an official proceeding
37 to which such person has been summoned.

38 (c) *Retaliation.* -- It is unlawful for a person to cause injury or loss to person or property,
39 or to threaten to do so where such threat is directed at inciting or producing imminent lawless
40 action of a violent nature that could cause bodily harm and is likely to incite or produce such action
41 or to attempt to do so, with the intent to:

42 (1) Retaliate against a public official or employee for the performance or nonperformance
43 of an official duty;

44 (2) Retaliate against a juror or witness for performing his or her official duties in an official
45 proceeding; or

46 (3) Retaliate against any other person for attending, testifying or participating in an official
47 proceeding, or for the production of any record, document or other object produced by a person
48 in an official proceeding.

49 (d) *Subsection (b) offense.* -- A person who is convicted of an offense under subsection
50 (b) is guilty of a misdemeanor and, shall be confined in jail for not more than one year or fined not
51 more than \$1,000, or both confined and fined. However, if the conduct giving rise to a conviction
52 of an offense under subsection (b) of this section results in injury or loss to person or property,
53 then the person is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be imprisoned in a correctional
54 facility not less than one nor more than 10 years or fined not more than \$2,000 or both fined and
55 imprisoned.

56 (e) *Subsection (c) or subsequent offense.* -- A person convicted of an offense under
57 subsection (c) of this section or a second offense under subsection (b) of this section is guilty of
58 a felony and, shall be ~~confined~~ imprisoned in a correctional facility not less than one nor more
59 than 10 years or fined not more than \$2,000, or both fined and imprisoned.

60 (f) *Civil cause of action.* -- A person who violates this section is liable in a civil action to
61 any person harmed by the violation for injury or loss to person or property incurred as a result of
62 the commission of the offense and for reasonable attorney's fees, court costs and other expenses
63 incurred as a result of prosecuting a civil action commenced under this subsection, which is not
64 the exclusive remedy of a person who suffers injury or loss to person or property as a result of a
65 violation of this section.

66 (g) *Civil sanctions.* -- In addition to the criminal and civil penalties set forth in this section,
67 any fraudulent official proceeding or legal process brought in a tribunal of this state in violation of
68 this section shall be dismissed by the tribunal and the person may be ordered to reimburse the
69 aggravated person for reasonable attorney's fees, court costs and other expenses incurred in

70 defending or dismissing such action.

71 (1) *Refusal to record.* -- A recorder may refuse to record a clearly fraudulent lien or other
72 legal process against a public official or employee or his or her property. The recorder does not
73 have a duty to inspect or investigate whether a lien or other legal process is fraudulent nor is the
74 recorder liable for refusing to record a lien or other legal process that the recorder believes is in
75 violation of this section.

76 (2) If a fraudulent lien or other legal process against a public official or employee or his or
77 her property is recorded then:

78 (A) *Request to release lien.* -- The public official or employee may send a written request
79 by certified mail to the person who filed the fraudulent lien or legal process, requesting the person
80 to release or dismiss the lien or legal process. If such lien or legal process is not properly released
81 or dismissed within 21 days, then it shall be inferred that the person intended to harass the public
82 official or employee in violation of subsection (b) of this section and shall be subject to the criminal
83 penalties in subsection (d) of this section and any other remedies provided in this section; or

84 (B) *Notice of fraudulent lien.* -- A government attorney on behalf of the public official or
85 employee may record a notice of fraudulent lien or legal process with the recorder who accepted
86 the lien or legal process for filing. Such notice shall invalidate the fraudulent lien or legal process
87 and cause it to be removed from the records. No filing fee shall be charged for the filing of the
88 notice.

89 (h) A person's lack of belief in the jurisdiction or authority of this state or of the United
90 States is no defense to prosecution of a civil or criminal action under this section.

91 (i)(1) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits the lawful acts of legitimate public
92 officials or employees.

93 (2) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits a person's lawful and legitimate
94 right to freely assemble, express opinions or designate group affiliation.

95 (3) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits a person's lawful and legitimate
96 access to a tribunal of this state or prevents a person from instituting or responding to a lawful
97 action.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to create a felony offense for intimidation of a public officer or juror that causes injury or loss to person or property in order to bring it in line with the penalty for retaliation. The bill sets penalties.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.