

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1749 (Dixon) – As Amended March 19, 2026

Policy Committee:	Emergency Management	Vote:	6 - 0
	Judiciary		12 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill prohibits a person from operating or using a drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with a wildfire suppression effort.

This bill authorizes the Attorney General (AG) or a county counsel or city attorney to bring a civil action to enforce the prohibition and authorizes a prevailing plaintiff to recover a civil penalty of up to \$75,000 per violation, injunctive relief, and reasonable attorney’s fees and costs.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Likely minor costs to the AG. The Department of Justice reports no significant impact from this bill, indicating the AG is unlikely to pursue related enforcement actions.
- 2) Ongoing cost pressures of an unknown amount, potentially up to \$150,000, to the courts in additional workload by authorizing a new civil action to enforce the drone interference prohibition that may be filed by the AG, county counsel, or city attorney (General Fund (GF) or Trial Court Trust Fund). It is unclear how many civil actions may be filed statewide and how much court time may be needed to resolve each case, but it generally costs approximately \$1,000 to operate a courtroom for one hour. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased pressure on staff and the TCTF may create a demand for increased court funding from the GF. The state budget provides annual GF backfills to the TCTF to offset revenue reductions, totaling approximately \$117.3 million in fiscal year 2025-26.

The Legislative Analyst’s Office recently warned of GF structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author, this bill is a “necessary tool for our emergency services when unauthorized drones impede wildfire suppression efforts.” The author explains:

According to the U.S. Forest Service, there were nine public drone incursions that resulted in the grounding of aerial firefighting efforts. Recently with the Palisades Fire in Los Angeles, a drone crashed into a firefighting Super Scooper plane, leaving a hole in the wing and grounding the aircraft for several days. Not only are the repairs to the

specialized equipment costly, but an aircraft or multiple aircrafts being grounded for an unspecified amount of time can be life threatening.

- 2) **Impeding Emergency Response.** Existing federal law provides that an individual operating a drone who knowingly or recklessly interferes with wildfire suppression is liable for a fine or up to two years of imprisonment. Existing state law imposes misdemeanor criminal liability on an individual at the scene of an emergency for the sole purpose of witnessing the emergency who impedes the ability of emergency responders to do their jobs. This criminal liability extends to an individual who impedes the emergency response by flying a drone over or around the site of an emergency. This bill prohibits and imposes civil liability on the operation or use of a drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with a wildfire suppression effort.
- 3) **Support and Opposition.** This bill is supported by law enforcement and first responder associations, with the California Professional Firefighters arguing this bill targets drone operators who “impede emergency response while providing an exemption for necessary, licensed operation, ensuring that firefighters are able to carry out their lifesaving, dangerous work without the inhibition of civilian unmanned aircraft interference.”

This bill is opposed by TechNet, unless amended to “ensure the bill does not inadvertently restrict legitimate, federally authorized drone operations that provide significant public and economic benefits” by providing “a clear exemption for drones operating pursuant to authorization by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), including those engaged in commercial activities under established federal frameworks.”

- 4) **Related Legislation.** AB 426 (Dixon) is similar to this bill, except AB 426 does not contain the “knowingly or recklessly” standard and prohibits any operation of a drone at the scene of an emergency response, with an exemption for a person granted a certain FAA waiver. AB 426 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee’s suspense file.

Analysis Prepared by: Irene Ho / APPR. / (916) 319-2081