

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1961 (Ahrens)

As Amended August 21, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes an employer to seek a temporary restraining order (TRO) and an order after hearing if harassment, unlawful violence, or a credible threat of violence is directed at an employer's workplace or a location where a group of employees perform their primary job duties. The employer need not name a specific employee in the petition for such orders.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Make clarifying changes.
- 2) Exempt from the review and approval process of the Department of General Services and the Department of Technology and certain state contracting reporting requirements, information technology contracts entered into or amended due to the Judicial Council adopting or modifying forms in order to implement the bill.

COMMENTS

Threats that target school sites are not always directed at a specific individual. Current law requires that an individual be listed when an employer, such as a local education agency, seeks a TRO on behalf of a group of employees. In an attempt to comply with this requirement, schools will list a school principal or superintendent on the required Judicial Council forms. Courts may deny these TRO requests on the grounds that the individual listed was neither personally present during the incident nor did they personally fear for their safety. Some examples from the sponsor of threats to group of employees in the educational context:

- 1) A Bay Area urban elementary district where a parent claimed to have a concealed firearm and threatened to "shoot up the school."
- 2) A Bay Area suburban elementary district where a student posted written threats online to kill teachers and classmates, including threats targeting students of color.
- 3) A Bay Area suburban district where a community member repeatedly loitered on campus without legitimate business, claiming to be looking for a "girlfriend" who did not exist, prompting safety concerns among families.
- 4) A Central Valley County Office of Education where a former employee drove recklessly through a parking lot in an apparent attempt to intimidate staff.

According to the Author

"AB 1961 addresses a critical gap in our workplace safety laws. Currently, employers can obtain workplace violence restraining orders when a specific employee is targeted. However, there has been a rise in threats directed at entire workplaces, especially schools, without naming any individual. In these cases, courts may deny protection, leaving workers and students at risk.

This bill enables restraining orders to be issued when threats are aimed at groups of employees at a workplace, rather than targeting individuals. It is a sensible solution that equips employers with the necessary tools to act swiftly, protect their workforce, and prevent violence before it occurs."

Arguments in Support

The School Employers Association of California is in support and states, "Under current law, employers may seek workplace violence restraining orders on behalf of employees who face harassment, unlawful violence, or credible threats of violence, so long as the threat is reasonably connected to the workplace. However, this requires the naming of a specific individual or individuals who have been threatened. This approach works effectively when the circumstances match the requirements set forth in the filing process. However, school campuses and employees are often subject to threats aimed at groups or a worksite location and not a named individual. These incidents have a real impact on employees' sense of safety and security even when an individual is not named.

AB 1961 addresses this problem by changing the definition of "employee" in the Civil Code of Procedure to encompass a group of employees based on their employer's worksite or where their primary job duties are performed. This change aims to reflect the real circumstances of the threats' intended audience or target."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee,

Unknown cost pressure to the courts to hear and adjudicate new WVRO requests and misdemeanor offenses for violations of any orders. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased cost pressure on the Trial Court Trust Fund may increase demand for additional funding. The FY 2026-27 Budget contains \$70 million to backfill the Trial Court Trust Fund (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund).

Minor, absorbable costs to the Judicial Council to modify WVRO forms (General Fund).

VOTES:

ASM LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT: 7-0-0

YES: Ortega, Lackey, Chen, Elhawary, Kalra, Lee, Ward

ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0

YES: Kalra, Macedo, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Dixon, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Sanchez, Stefani, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0-7

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Chen, Garcia, Hoover, Lackey, Ramos, Celeste Rodriguez

UPDATED

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