
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 789
Author: Bonta (D), et al.
Amended: 8/25/25 in Senate
Vote: 27

SENATE ELECTIONS & C.A. COMMITTEE: 4-0, 7/15/25
AYES: Cervantes, Allen, Limón, Umberg
NO VOTE RECORDED: Choi

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 59-4, 4/21/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Political Reform Act of 1974: security expenses

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill allows candidates for office and elected officials to use unlimited amounts of campaign funds for security purposes until January 1, 2029, and \$10,000 per year thereafter.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/25/25 clarify who is a family member that is prohibited from receiving payments for security services under the bill.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Includes the Political Reform Act (PRA), which establishes California's campaign finance and disclosure laws for state and local campaigns, candidates, officeholders, and ballot measures, and which created the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) to implement, administer, and enforce the PRA.
- 2) Prescribes that contributions deposited into a campaign account are held in trust to be used to elect candidates and for expenses associated with holding office.

- 3) Prohibits using campaign funds for the purchase, lease, or refurbishment of any appliance or equipment on real property leased or owned by a candidate, the candidate's campaign, or an immediate family member of the candidate.
- 4) Makes an exception to the prohibition in 3) for up to \$10,000 over the course of a candidate's or elected officer's lifetime to be spent for security expenses to protect the candidate, the elected officer, or the immediate family or staff thereof, provided that the threat arises from being a candidate, elected officer, or the family or staff of that person.
- 5) Defines security expenses for purposes of this exception in 4) above as:
 - a) The reasonable costs associated with installing and monitoring home or office electronic security.
 - b) The reasonable costs of providing personal security.
 - c) Any other tangible item related to security.
 - d) Excluding payments for a gun or made to a relative.
- 6) Mandates that the candidate or elected officer one year after leaving office or after the conclusion of the threat, whichever comes later, must return any tangible security items to the campaign or reimburse the campaign for them at their fair market value.
- 7) Requires the candidate or elected officer to report any expenditure or reimbursement for security to the FPPC on their annual campaign statement and to also submit a form signed under penalty of perjury that describes and verifies the threat to the candidate or elected officer or their immediate family or staff that arose as a result of being a candidate or elected officer.
- 8) Mandates that the candidate or elected officer maintain various records related to payments for security, including reports that provide evidence of the threat that gave rise to the expenditure.

This bill:

- 1) Deletes, until January 1, 2029, the lifetime cap on security expenses and allows a candidate or elected officer to expend an unlimited amount for these purposes.
- 2) Sets, beginning on January 1, 2029, a cap of \$10,000 per calendar for security expenses from campaign funds.

Comments

- 1) *Author's Statement.* Serving in elected office is an immense privilege and responsibility but in recent years, the climate surrounding public service has shifted dramatically. Candidates, elected officials, and the staff who support them are increasingly facing serious threats, harassment, and violence simply for carrying out their duties. These threats are not abstract. They are real, targeted, and growing in frequency and intensity.

Disturbing incidents have occurred across the nation from the murder of a state legislator and her husband in Minnesota to the evacuation of Governor Josh Shapiro and his family in Pennsylvania due to threats and arson. These events are not isolated. They are part of a broader pattern of political intimidation.

Public service should never require sacrificing one's personal safety or the safety of our families and staff. This bill provides a necessary tool to help protect those who step forward to serve. In doing so, it helps uphold the integrity of our democratic institutions and the safety of those who lead them.

- 2) *Less Than One Year.* This bill amends existing law that allows candidates and office holders to use campaign funds on personal security expenses for themselves, their families, and their staff members. AB 2041 (Bonta, Chapter 372, Statutes of 2024), an urgency measure, created this existing law and took effect on September 22, 2024. Prior to that, the PRA generally prohibited using campaign funds for these purposes with very limited exceptions for home or office security systems. Given the law has been in place for less than a year, it is unclear why it is now timely to delete the \$10,000 lifetime cap and allow for unlimited campaign spending on personal security services for candidates, elected officers, their staffs, and family members. After all, violence against candidates and public officials is a long-standing blight in this country and its political life. It has included armed individuals coming into the Assembly Chambers during an Assembly floor session, the storming of our nation's Capital, and the assassination of U.S. presidents, candidates, and legislators. It is, therefore, unclear why it is now timely to delete the cap limiting the use of campaign funds for personal security expenses.
- 3) *The \$10,000 Cap.* Amendments to AB 2041 made on the Senate Floor on August 22, 2024 imposed the \$10,000 life time cap in existing law. The bill imposes no cap for the next three years, and then places a \$10,000 per year cap after that. While the threats of violence against political figures appear to be increasing over the past several years, it is unclear what or how large of a constraint the existing cap has put on candidates and office holders over the past

10 months. Committee staff is unaware of any analysis indicating what problems the \$10,000 lifetime cap is creating or what an appropriate alternative cap would be.

- 4) *FPPC Data.* The FPPC reports that since the enactment of AB 2041 in September 2024, it has received five filings from candidates or elected officials indicating use of campaign funds for security expenses pursuant to existing law.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 2041 (Bonta, Chapter 372, Statutes of 2024) permits a candidate or elected official over their lifetime to use up to \$10,000 of campaign funds for specified security related expenses to protect the candidate, elected officer, or the immediate family or staff of that person.

AB 37 (Bonta) of 2023 would have authorized campaign funds to be used for costs related to security expenses, as defined, to protect a candidate, elected officer, or the immediate family or staff of a candidate or elected officer. Governor Newsom vetoed that bill. His veto message read:

While I support the author's intention, the bill as drafted does not clearly define "security expenses." Without more guidance on what would or would not be allowed as a legitimate use of campaign funds, this bill could have unintended consequences and could lead to use of political donations for expenditures far beyond what any reasonable donor would expect. We must ensure political donations are utilized in a manner consistent with their intended purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/26/25)

Todd Spitzer, District Attorney of Orange County
21st Century Alliance
California District Attorneys Association

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/26/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 59-4, 4/21/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Fariás, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon,

Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Davies, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Solache, Stefani, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: DeMaio, Ellis, Macedo, Tangipa

NO VOTE RECORDED: Castillo, Chen, Dixon, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Papan, Patterson, Ramos, Sanchez, Sharp-Collins, Soria, Ta

Prepared by: Carrie Cornwell / E. & C.A. / (916) 651-4106
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