

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 627 (Wiener, et al.)
As Amended August 21, 2025
2/3 vote. Urgency

SUMMARY

Prohibits certain law enforcement officers from wearing a facial covering in the performance of their duties, among other things.

Major Provisions

- 1) Prohibits a peace officer, as defined, and any officer or agent of a federal law enforcement agency, or any person acting on behalf of a federal law enforcement agency, from wearing a facial covering in the performance of their duties.
- 2) Makes a first violation of this prohibition an infraction, and a second or subsequent violation a misdemeanor.
- 3) Defines "facial covering" for the purposes of this bill, to mean any opaque mask, garment, helmet, or other item that conceals or obscures the facial identity of an individual, including but not limited to a balaclava, tactical mask, gator, ski mask, and any similar type of facial covering or face-shielding item.
- 4) Excludes the following from the definition of "facial covering":
 - a) A translucent face shield or clear mask that does not conceal the wearer's facial identity.
 - b) A N95 medical mask or surgical mask to protect against transmission of disease or infection, or any other mask or device, including but not limited to air purifying respirators, full or half-masks, or self-contained breathing apparatus necessary to protect against exposure to any toxin, gas, smoke, or any other hazardous environmental condition.
- 5) Provides that the above facial covering prohibition does not apply to an officer performing their duties as an undercover operative during an active undercover operation, and defines the following terms, for purposes of the exemption for undercover officers:
 - a) "Undercover operation" is a planned act, authorized by supervising agents, agencies, or court warrant that uses an undercover operative to intentionally interact with a suspected criminal violator, or others, or to obtain evidence of criminal activity.
 - b) "Undercover operative" means a sworn peace officer using an assumed name or cover identity to interact with non-law enforcement individuals or entities to collect evidence of criminal activity.
- 6) Provides that the above prohibition does not apply to protective gear used by Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team officers that are necessary to protect their faces from harm while performing their SWAT responsibilities.
- 7) Requires a state or local law enforcement agency, as defined, on or before July 1, 2026, to adopt policies regulating the use of facial coverings pursuant to the above requirements.

- 8) Requires state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies, before undertaking operations that are reasonably likely to involve agency personnel wearing facial coverings, as defined, in the performance of their duties, to provide advance notice to the local law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over the location where the operation takes place.
- 9) Requires this advance notice to be given sufficiently in advance to prevent danger to law enforcement officers based on mistaken identities, but no less than 12 hours before the operation, and shall include when and where they will be operating, their planned actions, and the approximate time and duration of the action.
- 10) Provides that this advance notice requirement does not apply to:
 - a) A law enforcement officer or officers performing their duty as an undercover operative during an active undercover operation, and defines the following terms:
 - i) "Undercover operative" means a sworn peace officer using an assumed name or cover identity to interact with non-law enforcement individuals or entities to collect evidence of criminal activity.
 - ii) "Undercover operation" is a planned act, authorized by supervising agents, agencies, or court warrant that uses a undercover operative to intentionally interact with a suspected criminal violator, or others, or to obtain evidence of criminal activity.
 - b) Under exigent circumstances involving an immediate danger to persons or property, or the escape of a perpetrator.
- 11) Includes a severability clause.
- 12) Makes this bill an urgency statute.

COMMENTS

According to the Author

"SB 627 prohibits law enforcement at all levels from covering their faces while conducting operations in the state of California unless they are wearing a medical grade mask, masks designed to protect against exposure to smoke during a wildfire, or protective gear used by SWAT officers while performing SWAT responsibilities. The recent federal operations in California have created an environment of profound terror, with officers — or people who claim to be officers — wearing what are essentially ski masks, not identifying themselves, grabbing people, putting them in unmarked cars, and disappearing them. If we want the public to trust law enforcement, we cannot allow them to behave like secret police in an authoritarian state. We would not trust a masked stranger to teach our kids, treat our wounds, or enter our homes. Law enforcement officers do critically important work to keep our communities safe, and when real officers are indistinguishable from imposters, everyone is at risk – including the officers themselves. Prohibiting law enforcement officers from wearing masks or personal disguises to hide their face boosts trust in law enforcement, which makes it easier for law enforcement to do their jobs and makes California safer for all of us."

Arguments in Support

According to *Prosecutors Alliance Action*, "[SB 627] will ensure federal, state, and local law enforcement officers are accountable to the communities they serve and cannot conceal their identities behind masks while policing our streets. This critical bill will strengthen transparency and trust in law enforcement, protect against bad actors seeking to impersonate the police, and promote public safety.

"In a democratic society, those who wield the power to detain, arrest, and use force must do so openly, not from behind a mask. Yet, across California and the country, we're witnessing, with horror, as members of our communities are being taken by masked and anonymous federal agents – no name, no face, no badge, no accountability.

"This creates dangerous conditions for the public and for law enforcement. Without visible identification, there's no way for the public to verify whether someone is a legitimate officer or an imposter – a vulnerability that has already been exploited by violent actors dressed up in camo, tactical gear, and masks. And when officers engage in misconduct while concealing their identities, there's no meaningful path to accountability and justice.

"Similarly, for law enforcement officers to do their jobs effectively, their safety often depends upon members of the public recognizing and trusting them, especially in high-stress, high-risk situations. This is why genuine law enforcement officers typically wear uniforms, with name and badge visible, and ride in marked vehicles.

"When masked individuals grab people off the street and load them into unmarked vehicles, witnesses have no way of knowing whether they're watching a lawful arrest or a violent crime in progress. In that chaos, someone will eventually get hurt – including officers themselves.

"SB 627 is a common-sense safeguard to protect both the public and law enforcement, and it strengthens the foundation of trust that is essential to keeping communities safe."

Arguments in Opposition

According to the *California Association of Highway Patrolmen*, "SB 627... would make it a crime for a law enforcement officer to wear any mask or personal disguise while interacting with the public in the performance of their duties.

"The issue surrounding law enforcement wearing masks has been brought into the national spotlight with the recent anti-ICE protests throughout California and other states. As California's State Police, CHP officers are on the ground during huge protests and riots to maintain the safety of all involved. While law enforcement's main duty is to protect civilians, they must also protect themselves.

"Threats of violence towards law enforcement is on the rise and death threats towards an officer and their family are a common occurrence. With the influx of retaliation and violence towards law enforcement, confidentiality is absolutely critical to the safety of officers and their families.

"SB 627 puts officers and their families' lives and well-being at risk by prohibiting them from protecting their identity when needed.

"In addition, officers are on the scenes of riots and other violent demonstrations. They are often times spit at and wear a mask to protect themselves from illness or disease. With the passage of this bill, simply protecting themselves is now a crime.

"The decision to utilize a mask or face covering are made on location, based on the specific situation which often change within minutes. So, to require law enforcement agencies to provide advance notice when an officer is likely to use a mask or face covering is futile."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) One-time costs to each state and local law enforcement agency to adopt the required policy regarding facial coverings (local funds, General Fund, special funds). There are approximately 600 law enforcement agencies in California. These costs are unlikely to be significant for each agency, but in the aggregate statewide may be in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars one-time.
- 2) To the extent there are prosecutions for misdemeanor violations of the prohibition on unauthorized facial coverings by law enforcement officers, there will be related cost pressures to the courts (Trial Court Trust Fund) to adjudicate the criminal charges and costs to the counties (local funds) to incarcerate people who are convicted. These actual cost pressures and costs will depend on the number of prosecutions and convictions. Since a law enforcement agency may avoid criminal liability for its officers by adopting a policy regarding use of facial coverings, as required by the bill, there may not be many criminal charges filed.
- 3) Cost pressures (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) to the courts to adjudicate civil actions for which defendants may not assert privileges or immunities as a result of this bill. Actual costs will depend on the number of actions and the amount of court time required by each action. 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 the Trial Court Trust Fund may create a demand for increased funding for courts from the General Fund. The fiscal year 2025-26 state budget provides \$82 million ongoing General Fund to the Trial Court Trust Fund for court operations.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 36-0-4

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Hurtado, Reyes, Rubio, Valladares

ASM PUBLIC SAFETY: 5-2-2

YES: Schultz, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Sharp-Collins
NO: Alanis, Lackey
ABS, ABST OR NV: Nguyen, Ramos

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 10-3-2

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Pacheco, Jeff Gonzalez

UPDATED

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