

Date of Hearing: July 16, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 701 (Wahab) – As Amended July 3, 2025

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill creates three crimes related to the manufacturing, sales, and operation of a device that intentionally blocks, jams, or interferes with authorized radio transmissions (“signal jammer”).

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Makes it a crime to manufacture, import, market, purchase, sell, or operate a signal jammer without federal authorization, as specified. A first offense is an infraction punishable by a fine of up to \$500. A second or subsequent offense is a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in county jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both a jail term and fine.
- 2) Makes it a crime to operate a signal jammer in conjunction with the commission of another misdemeanor or felony. This offense is a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in county jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both a jail term and fine.
- 3) Makes it a crime to willfully or maliciously use a signal jammer to block state or local public safety communications, where the defendant knows or should know that using the signal jammer is likely to result in death or great bodily injury and great bodily injury or death is sustained by any person as a result of that use. This offense may be charged as a felony or a misdemeanor and is punishable as follows:
 - a) As a misdemeanor by up to one year in county jail.
 - b) As a felony by 16 months, two years, or three years in county jail, or by a term in state prison if the defendant has certain prior convictions.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Cost pressures (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) of an unknown but potentially significant amount to the courts to adjudicate criminal charges resulting from this bill. A defendant charged with a misdemeanor or felony is entitled to a jury trial and, if the defendant is indigent, legal representation provided by the government. Actual court costs will depend on the number of violations, prosecutorial discretion, and the amount of court time needed to adjudicate each case. 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.

- 2) Costs (local funds, General Fund) to the counties and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to incarcerate people convicted of the crimes created by this bill. Actual incarceration costs will depend on the number of convictions, the length of each sentence, and whether each sentence must be served in county jail or state prison. The average annual cost to incarcerate one person in county jail is approximately \$29,000, though costs are higher in larger counties. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the average annual cost to incarcerate one person in state prison is \$133,000. County incarceration costs are not subject to reimbursement by the state. However, overcrowding in county jails creates cost pressure on the General Fund because the state has historically granted new funding to counties to offset overcrowding resulting from public safety realignment.

COMMENTS:

Law enforcement agencies and other emergency response entities use multiple methods of communication during the commission of their duties. Some of these methods – including radio frequencies used for emergency dispatch and internal law enforcement communications – can be significantly impaired by signal jammers. As summarized by the Assembly Committee on Public Safety:

Signal jammers are devices that intentionally transmit signals on the same frequencies that other telecommunications devices operate on, preventing them from sending and receiving information. Signal jammers can emit frequencies that interfere with a range of devices, including radios, drones, cellular networks, GPS and WiFi. Although it is illegal to possess, manufacture, purchase, or sell signal jammers under federal law, it is not difficult to find such devices for sale online.

Federal law prohibits the manufacture, marketing, sale, and operation of signal jammers, punishable by incarceration in federal prison and fines of up to \$10,000, with harsher penalties for willfully and maliciously interfering with federal government communications. This bill creates similar state crimes related to the manufacture and use of signal jammers.

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