

## SENATE THIRD READING

SB 701 (Wahab)

As Amended July 3, 2025

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Establishes various criminal penalties for acts by a person with a signal jammer.

**Major Provisions**

- 1) Makes it an infraction for any person to manufacture, import, market, purchase, sell or operate a signal jammer, unless authorized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), punishable by forfeiture of the signal jamming device, and a fine not to exceed \$500.
- 2) States that a second or subsequent offense involving manufacture, import, marketing, purchasing, selling or operating a signal jammer is punishable as a misdemeanor with up to one-year imprisonment in county jail, by a \$1,000 fine, or by both fine and imprisonment.
- 3) Provides that a person who operates a signal jammer in conjunction with the commission of a misdemeanor or felony is guilty of a crime, punishable as a misdemeanor with up to one-year imprisonment in county jail, or by a fine of up to \$1,000, or by both fine and imprisonment.
- 4) Provides that a person who willfully or maliciously uses a signal jammer to block state or local public safety communications, and who knows or should know that death or great bodily injury will result and death or great bodily injury do result, is guilty of an alternate felony/misdemeanor.
- 5) States that conviction of a crime with a signal jammer requires forfeiture of the device.
- 6) Specifies that the above prohibitions do not apply to the authorized and lawful use of signal jammers by local or state law enforcement.
- 7) Defines "signal jammer" to mean a device that intentionally blocks, jams, or interferes with authorized radio or wireless communications.
- 8) Defines "public safety communications" to mean the systems, technologies, and methods used by emergency response agencies, firefighters, and Emergency Management Services (EMS), to communicate with each other.

**COMMENTS****According to the Author**

"Signal jammers are an increasingly prevalent problem across the US. They've been used in conjunction with burglaries, car thefts, bank heists, and more, blocking critical communication frequencies that WiFi, GPS, radio, and cell signals all rely on. While signal jammers are already illegal under federal law and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules, they continue to pose a major threat to emergency response and public safety due to an absence of adequate California state regulations.

"SB 701 will allow state and local enforcement agencies to take direct action against these dangerous devices to protect the public from bad actors using signal jammers to facilitate serious crimes. SB 701 bans manufacturing, importing, marketing, purchasing, selling, or operating a signal jammer, with harsher penalties for possessing or operating a signal jammer in conjunction with a crime or maliciously using a signal jammer to block public safety communications."

**Arguments in Support**

According to the *California Police Chiefs Association*, "By creating state laws regarding the use of these already illegal devices, we empower our state and local law enforcement agencies to investigate and take action against these dangerous devices.

"Law enforcement agencies nationwide are dealing with severe and evolving threats posed by radio frequency signal jammers. These devices, which are already illegal under federal law and regulations, can cause interference, potentially resulting in a denial of service for critical communications such as cellular, land mobile radio, Global Position Systems, and wireless security systems. They may also significantly impact operation coordination and officer and first responder safety.

"Signal jammers emit radio frequency signals or noise in specific bands to overpower and block other signals, such as authorized communications transmissions. These devices come in all shapes and sizes, can be purchased online or constructed at home, and have been used to mask crimes, such as burglary, vehicle theft, cargo theft, parole violations, drug/human trafficking, and acts of terrorism. From fiscal years 2021-23, federal agencies recorded over 650 signal jammer seizures.

"Signal jamming is illegal under the United States Communication Act of 1934 and through accompanying regulations established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Any use of unfederally authorized jamming technology is prohibited, as is the manufacturing, sale, importation, and marketing. In addition, several states – Florida, Texas, Arizona, and Alabama – have recently passed laws making it illegal under their statutes, thereby empowering local law enforcement to take necessary action against the problem."

**Arguments in Opposition**

According to *La Defensa*, "While we appreciate the importance of deterring and addressing interference with lawful law enforcement activities, we believe existing law already sufficiently accomplishes this purpose. Therefore, this bill is duplicative and will unnecessarily increase state costs.

"Federal law already prohibits the manufacture, importation, marketing, sale or operation of signal jammers within the United States. (47 U.S.C. Section 302a, subd. (b).) Federal law also prohibits the willful or malicious interference with the radio communications of any station licensed or authorized under the Federal Communications Act. (47 U.S.C. Section 333.) California public safety communications fall under the Federal Communications Act and are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. Any person who willfully or maliciously interferes with California public safety communications can already be charged with a federal offense and punished by significant fines and sentenced to a federal prison term. (47 U.S.C. Section 501.)

"California law likewise prohibits the conduct contemplated by SB 701. Penal Code section 148 prohibits a person who maliciously interrupts, disrupts, impedes, or otherwise interferes with the transmission of a communication over a public safety radio frequency. (Penal Code, Section 148, subd. (a)(2).)

"California's Penal Code has been criticized for its complexity and its unnecessary duplication of existing crimes. As former Governor Brown cautioned nearly 10 years ago in numerous veto messages:

'Each of these bills creates a new crime – usually by finding a novel way to characterize and criminalize conduct that is already proscribed. This multiplication and particularization of criminal behavior creates increasing complexity without commensurate benefit.

Over the last several decades, California's criminal code has grown to more than 5,000 separate provisions, covering almost every conceivable form of human misbehavior. During the same period, our jail and prison populations have exploded...'

"Given existing state and federal penalties, we see no need to create new, overlapping state penalties and add to our already labyrinthine Penal Code."

## FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 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.

## VOTES

### SENATE FLOOR: 38-0-2

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

### ASM PUBLIC SAFETY: 9-0-0

**YES:** Schultz, Alanis, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Lackey, Nguyen, Ramos, Sharp-Collins

**UPDATED**

VERSION: July 3, 2025

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