

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6082

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE, FEBRUARY 6, 1992

Brief Description: Defining criminal impersonation of a law enforcement officer.

SPONSORS: Senators L. Smith, Nelson and Thorsness

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6082 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Nelson, Chairman; Thorsness, Vice Chairman; Hayner, M. Kreidler, Madsen, Newhouse, Rasmussen, and A. Smith.

Staff: Susan Carlson (786-7418)

Hearing Dates: February 3, 1992; February 6, 1992

BACKGROUND:

Under current law, criminal impersonation is defined as assuming a false identity or pretending to be a representative of an organization and doing an act in that pretended capacity with intent to defraud another or for any other unlawful purpose. Criminal impersonation is a gross misdemeanor.

There is concern that incidents of impersonating a police officer may jeopardize the public's trust in legitimate law enforcement officers, even though the impersonator may not have acted with intent to defraud or for other unlawful purposes. It has been suggested that the act of impersonating an officer should be restricted further than is provided by current law.

SUMMARY:

The crime of criminal impersonation is committed if a person pretends to be a law enforcement officer and does an act in that pretended capacity with intent to harass, intimidate, restrain, torment, or embarrass another person.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

The definition of impersonating an officer is amended to provide that a person is guilty if the person falsely claims to be a law enforcement officer or creates a false impression that he or she is a law enforcement officer, and does an act with intent to convey the impression that he or she is acting in an official capacity.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

The bill provides a specific definition for impersonating a law enforcement officer that does not exist in current law. Impersonating an officer can be dangerous to the impersonator, and any persons he or she contacts, as well as jeopardizing the public trust in legitimate police officers.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Senator Linda Smith, prime sponsor; Richard Melnick, Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys; Capt. Tim Erickson, Washington State Patrol; Donald Weidner