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**HOUSE BILL 2078**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Schmidt, Riccelli, Low, Christian, Klicker, Reed, Ormsby, Ybarra, Cheney, and McClintock

AN ACT Relating to improving school safety by extending and increasing penalties for interference by, or intimidation by threat of, force or violence at schools and school-related athletic activities; amending RCW 28B.10.570 and 28B.10.571; creating a new section; and prescribing penalties.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that incidents of violence at institutions of higher education raise concerns about ensuring and promoting the safety of staff and students. For learning to occur, institutions must first be safe places for students, faculty, and other institutional employees. The legislature recognizes that violent behavior tends to escalate if tolerated, thus it is the intent of the legislature to provide targeted and appropriate sanctions for the interference with institutional activities by force or violence before it rises to the level of substantial or grievous bodily harm.

(2) The legislature further finds that athletic activities provide valuable opportunities for participants to develop social and personal skills that can be useful throughout their lives. These activities also benefit other students and spectators by building school spirit, unity, and community support and identity. Athletic activities would not be possible without the commitment of officials, judges, referees, and volunteers who work at the events for little or no financial gain. The legislature finds that the values engendered in athletic activities are being undermined by participants and spectators who do not respect the commitment of these officials. Increasingly, these people are expressing their dissatisfaction through inappropriate verbal abuse and behavior directed at the officials. The legislature recognizes that officials, judges, referees, and volunteers at athletic events are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate conduct because their attention is focused on the conduct of the events. Thus, the legislature intends to provide additional support and protection for officials conducting athletic events.

(3) The legislature finds that violence against staff at institutions of higher education is unacceptable. Thus, to promote a safe learning environment, the legislature intends to increase the penalty for those perpetrating violence against students and staff at institutions of higher education.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.10.570 and 2015 c 55 s 203 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) It ((~~shall be~~)) is unlawful for any person, singly or in concert with others, to interfere by force or violence with ((~~any administrator, faculty member, or student of any university, college, or community or technical college who~~)) an employee, contractor, or student of any institution of higher education, or an official, or volunteer acting as an official, for athletic activities of any institution of higher education, while that person is in the peaceful discharge or conduct of his or her duties or studies.

(2) A person violating this section is guilty of a ((~~gross misdemeanor and shall be fined not more than five hundred dollars, or imprisoned in jail not more than six months, or both such fine and imprisonment~~)) class C felony punishable under chapter 9A.20 RCW. Upon conviction, a person must be excluded from entering the institution of higher education where the crime was committed or from attending the athletic activities in which the crime was committed, for a period of up to 12 months.

(3) As used in this section, "institution of higher education" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.92.030.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.10.571 and 2015 c 55 s 204 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) It ((~~shall be~~)) is unlawful for any person, singly or in concert with others, to intimidate by threat of force or violence ((~~any administrator, faculty member, or student of any university, college, or community or technical college who~~)) an employee, contractor, or student of any institution of higher education, or an official, or volunteer acting as an official, for athletic activities of any institution of higher education, while that person is in the peaceful discharge or conduct of his or her duties or studies.

(2) A person violating this section is guilty of a ((~~gross misdemeanor and shall be fined not more than five hundred dollars, or imprisoned in jail not more than six months, or both such fine and imprisonment~~)) class C felony punishable under chapter 9A.20 RCW.

(3) As used in this section, "institution of higher education" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.92.030.

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