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**HOUSE BILL 2079**

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

**By** Representatives Schmidt, Riccelli, Low, Christian, Klicker, Ormsby, McClintock, and Couture

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 athletic activities; amending RCW 28A.635.090 and 28A.635.100; 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 in elementary and secondary schools raise concerns about ensuring and promoting school safety. For learning to occur, schools must first be safe places for students and staff. 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 school activities by force or violence before it rises to the level of substantial or grievous bodily harm.

(2) The legislature understands that extracurricular athletics provide valuable opportunities for students 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, community support, and community identity. Extracurricular athletics 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 interscholastic 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, such as judges and referees, and volunteers acting as officials, for extracurricular athletic activities of elementary and secondary school students are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate conduct because their attention is focused on the athletic activities. Thus, the legislature intends to provide additional support and protection for officials conducting interscholastic events.

(3) The legislature finds that violence against public and private students and staff is unacceptable. Thus, to promote a safe learning environment, the legislature intends to increase the penalty for those perpetrating violence against students and school staff to match the penalty for assault on school bus drivers.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.635.090 and 2003 c 53 s 169 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, teacher, classified employee, person under contract with the school or school district, or student of any common school who~~)) an employee or contractor of a public or private elementary or secondary school, an elementary or secondary student, or an official, or volunteer acting as an official, for extracurricular athletic activities of elementary or secondary students, while that person is in the peaceful discharge or conduct of his or her duties or studies. ((~~Any such interference by force or violence committed by a student shall be grounds for immediate suspension or expulsion of the student.~~))

(2) If a public school student interferes as described in subsection (1) of this section, the interference is grounds for the student's emergency removal, subject to RCW 28A.600.015. If a public school student interferes as described in subsection (1) of this section during extracurricular athletic activities, the student may be excluded from participating in or attending that activity for up to 12 months.

(3) 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, other than a student, must be excluded from entering the school where the crime was committed or from attending the extracurricular athletic activities in which the crime was committed, for a period of up to 12 months.

(4) As used in this section, "public school" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.010.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.635.100 and 2003 c 53 s 170 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, teacher, classified employee, or student of any common school who~~)) an employee or contractor of a public or private elementary or secondary school, an elementary or secondary student, or an official, or volunteer acting as an official, for extracurricular athletic activities of elementary or secondary students, 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.

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