

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5272

As Passed Senate, January 28, 2026

Title: An act relating to improving school safety by extending penalties for interference by, or intimidation by threat of, force or violence at schools and extracurricular activities and requiring schools to notify the public of such penalties.

Brief Description: Improving school safety by extending penalties for interference by, or intimidation by threat of, force or violence at schools and extracurricular activities and requiring schools to notify the public of such penalties.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Krishnadasan and Saldaña.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/30/25, 2/13/25 [DP, w/oRec].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 1/28/26, 46-3.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Expands the school-related crimes of Interference by Force or Violence and Intimidation by Threat of Force or Violence, and increases the penalties for Interference by Force or Violence.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Cortes, Hansen and Krishnadasan.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Harris, Ranking Member; Dozier and McCune.

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: Interference or Intimidation by Force or Violence. It is a gross misdemeanor for any person 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 is in the peaceful discharge or conduct of his or her duties or studies. It is also a gross misdemeanor for any person to intimidate by threat of force or violence. The penalty for both gross misdemeanors is a fine up to \$500, imprisonment for not more than six months, or both a fine and imprisonment.

Any such interference by force or violence committed by a student is grounds for immediate suspension or expulsion of the student.

Student Discipline. State law requires school board directors to adopt reasonable written rules regarding student conduct, discipline, and rights in accordance with federal and state law and rules and the Washington State School Director's Association's model policies and procedures related to student discipline. State law and rules address requirements related to emergency removals, suspensions, and expulsions.

Summary of Engrossed Bill: The offenses of Interference by Force or Violence and Intimidation by Threat of Force or Violence are expanded to include 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.

The penalty for Interference by Force or Violence is a fine up to \$1,000, instead of \$500, imprisonment for not more than 365 days, instead of six months, or both a fine and imprisonment.

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 no less than 12 months and no more than 18 months. Language providing that any such interference by force or violence committed by a student is grounds for immediate suspension or expulsion of that student is removed.

The penalty for Intimidation by Threat of Force or Violence is not changed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on January 29, 2026.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will make sure all participants in school sports, including students, coaches, and officials, can engage in the game with respect and without fear. Many sports officials experience fear and are threatened, and they feel sportsmanship is getting worse. It is difficult to recruit officials and they often quit officiating because of their negative experiences. This bill is not about putting people into jail or preventing disagreements, but it will act as a deterrent for anyone thinking about crossing the line. Referees should have support and safety at all times.

CON: Extracurricular activities can change the lives of young people. Sports are highly competitive and create moments of excitement and heated interactions. Young people's brains are not fully developed until they are 25, which means they struggle with regulating their reactions in these moments. Penalizing youth for these interactions can be incredibly harmful, especially when sports are sometimes the only motivation to stay on a positive path. The vague language in this bill could lead to inconsistent enforcement and contradicts the state's equity goals.

OTHER: Incidents of violence at sporting events has increased in recent years. This bill would serve as an important deterrent for this type of behavior. Principals often have to attend these events at home and away to help manage, and they want to continue to have the authority to determine consequences for their students. It is not clear who will pay for new signage. There are questions about who will enforce this law and report incidents, and whether this will apply to all extracurricular activities. The bill should include private schools, charter schools, and tribal schools.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator John Lovick, Prime Sponsor; Robert West; Ricardo Pineda-Lomeli, Latino Community Fund Washington; Daryl Eygabroad, Western Washington Wrestling Officials Association.

CON: Porsche Phelps, TeamChild.

OTHER: Roz Thompson, Association of Washington School Principals.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.