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H.B. 504
134th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for H.B. 504's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Passed by the Senate

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Carfagna and Johnson

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

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Highlights

- The increased penalty for the offense of “disturbing a lawful meeting” may create some additional costs for county or municipal criminal justice systems, in terms of increased jail time and adjudication costs. Any increase is likely to be minimal annually and may be partially offset by fees, fines, and courts costs, if collected.

Detailed Analysis

The bill increases the penalty for “disturbing a lawful meeting” when committed in either of the following situations:

1. The violation is committed with the intent to disturb or disquiet any assemblage of people met for religious worship at a tax-exempt place of worship and disturbs the order and solemnity of the assemblage; or
2. The violation is committed with the intent to prevent, disrupt, or interfere with a virtual meeting or gathering of people for religious worship, through use of a computer, computer system, telecommunications system, or other electronic device or system, or in any other manner.

Under current law generally, the offense of “disturbing a lawful meeting” is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree, punishable by up to 30 days in jail, a fine of up to \$250, or both. The bill increases this penalty to a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable by up to 180 days in jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both, if either of the above two conditions apply.

Because of the bill, a person who violates the bill’s conditions could serve additional jail time and a higher fine if convicted. Since the conduct is generally already prohibited under current law, the bill is not expected to generate new cases. Instead, it is likely the bill will only impact a relatively small number of cases that may be subject to the penalty enhancement (from

a fourth degree misdemeanor to a first degree misdemeanor), possibly resulting in additional court time to adjudicate a case due to the potential for increased jail time and fines. Taken together, any increase a county or municipal criminal justice system incurs to process cases is likely to be minimal annually and may be partially offset by fines, fees, and courts costs, if collected.¹

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¹ It is not unusual for fines to go uncollected, as some offenders are unwilling and/or unable to pay.