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H.B. 504
134th General Assembly

Final Analysis

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Primary Sponsors: Reps. Carfagna and Johnson

Effective date: April 6, 2023

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SUMMARY

- Increases the penalty for the offense of “disturbing a lawful meeting” from a fourth degree misdemeanor to a first degree misdemeanor if either of the following apply:
 - 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.
 - 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.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Disturbing a lawful meeting

Prohibition

Under continuing law, the prohibition under the offense of “disturbing a lawful meeting” prohibits a person, with purpose to prevent or disrupt a lawful meeting, procession, or gathering, from doing either of the following:¹

- Doing any act which obstructs or interferes with the due conduct of the meeting, procession, or gathering;
- Making any utterance, gesture, or display that outrages the sensibilities of the group.

¹ R.C. 2917.12(A).

Penalty

The penalty for a violation of the prohibition a fourth degree misdemeanor. The act increases the penalty for a violation of the offense to a first degree misdemeanor if either of the following applies:²

- 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, regardless of whether the conduct is within the place at which the assemblage is held or is on the property on which that place is located and disturbs the order and solemnity of the assemblage.
- 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.

Definitions

The act defines the following terms:³

- “Computer” means an electronic device that performs logical, arithmetic, and memory functions by the manipulation of electronic or magnetic impulses. “Computer” includes, but is not limited to, all input, output, processing, storage, computer program, or communication facilities that are connected, or related, in a computer system or network to an electronic device of that nature.
- “Computer system” means a computer and related devices, whether connected or unconnected, including, but not limited to, data input, output, and storage devices, data communications links, and computer programs and data that make the system capable of performing specified special purpose data processing tasks.
- “Telecommunications device” means any instrument, equipment, machine, or other device that facilitates telecommunication, including, but not limited to, a computer, computer network, computer chip, computer circuit, scanner, telephone, cellular telephone, pager, personal communications device, transponder, receiver, radio, modem, or device that enables the use of a modem.
- “Virtual meeting or gathering” means a meeting or gathering by interactive video conference or teleconference, or both.

² R.C. 2917.12(B).

³ R.C. 2917.12(C); and by reference to R.C. 2913.01, not in the act.

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	12-07-21
Reported, H. Criminal Justice	03-28-22
Passed House (95-1)	04-06-22
Reported, S. Judiciary	12-14-22
Passed Senate (32-0)	12-14-22
