

SB 5427, to provide up to \$2,000 for people to report their neighbors for “hate crimes” and “bias incidents”

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January 2024

Key Findings

- 1. SB 5427 would offer people a reward of up to \$2,000 to report their neighbors, co-workers, family members and other people in the community for a “hate crime” or “bias incident.”**
- 2. The bill would create a hotline to the state Attorney General’s office for this purpose.**
- 3. The dollar reward would create an incentive to report incidents even when there is no evidence a criminal violation had occurred.**
- 4. The bill would create the possibility that informants will simply report people they don’t like to get them in trouble with the Attorney General.**
- 5. Under the bill the term “bias incident” can include “expressions” and other verbal statements, raising civil rights concerns about criminalizing First Amendment-protected speech.**
- 6. The bill provides no process for accused people to clear their names.**
- 7. This bill creates a financial incentive for people to judge each other, creating a suspicious, hostile environment in classrooms, workplaces and in the community.**

Introduction

SB 5427 would create a special hotline to the Attorney General’s office and provide an incentive of up to \$2,000 per claim to people who report to authorities that they have knowledge of a “hate crime” or “bias incident” committed by a neighbor, co-worker, family member or others residing in their community.

Policy Analysis

Like any dollar reward offered by the government, the bill would create a financial incentive to report “hate” or “racial” incidents even when there is no evidence that a violation has occurred. The bill would create an atmosphere of suspicion in which informants may simply report people they don’t like to get them in trouble with the Attorney General and cause a public scandal.

The bill text is not limited to rewards for reporting criminal activity. Under the bill, the term a “bias incident” can include language “expressions” and other verbal statements. This raises civil rights concerns about criminalizing First Amendment-protected speech. It would also have a chilling effect on free expression.

It would cause people to be guarded in their statements about perceived controversial race issues, out of fear of being turned in to the state Attorney General’s office. Critics call it the “Fink on your friends” bill.

Like the Ministry of Truth legislation that failed in past sessions, this bill calls for creating an officially sanctioned surveillance and reporting system to monitor the expressions and speech of private citizens. Coverage of the bill is all-inclusive – anyone can claim a \$2,000 payment, and anyone can be named as engaging in a “hate crime” or “bias incident.”

No standard of evidence

The bill does not provide any standard of evidence, or provide a process which accused people could use to clear their names. Although reports to the proposed “hotline” are described as confidential, there is always the possibility that government agencies will leak the information to the public. As seen in recent years, leaking sensitive personal information has become common practice among national law enforcement agencies. The same trend is always possible at the state level.

Imagine what this would do to confidence in public schools. Students could use the hotline to report other students or to report provocative statements made in class by their teachers. The bill would create a financial incentive for people to judge each other, creating a suspicious and hostile environment in classrooms, workplaces and in the community.

Conclusion

SB 5427 would add to the trend of the legislature passing controversial laws that create division among people living in Washington. In recent years the legislature has passed SB 6066, SB 5044 and other bills that endorse Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs promoted by public schools, state agencies, and institutions of higher education.

SB 5427 would send a signal that lawmakers intend to continue on the same path, enacting policies that work against the promoting trust and good will among citizens and with those who serve us in government.

*Liv Finne is the Director of
the Center for Education.*

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Washington Policy Center
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