WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §61-5-27

§61-5-27. Intimidation of and retaliation against public officers and employees, jurors, and witnesses; fraudulent official proceedings and legal processes against public officials and employees; making public threats directed at inciting lawless action penalties.

(a) Definitions. — As used in this section:

"Fraudulent" means not legally issued or sanctioned under the laws of this state or of the United States, including forged, false, and materially misstated;

"Legal process" means an action, appeal, document instrument, or other writing issued, filed, or recorded to pursue a claim against person or property, exercise jurisdiction, enforce a judgment, fine a person, put a lien on property, authorize a search and seizure, arrest a person, incarcerate a person, or direct a person to appear, perform, or refrain from performing a specified act. "Legal process" includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, decree, demand, indictment, injunction, judgment, lien, motion, notice, order, petition, pleading, sentence, subpoena, summons, warrant, or writ;

"Official proceeding" means a proceeding involving a legal process or other process of a tribunal of this state or of the United States;

"Person" means an individual, group, association, corporation, or any other entity;

"Public official or employee" means an elected or appointed official or employee of a state or federal court, commission, department, agency, political subdivision, or any governmental instrumentality;

"Recorder" means a clerk or other employee in charge of recording instruments in a court, commission, or other tribunal of this state or of the United States; and

"Tribunal" means a court or other judicial or quasi-judicial entity, or an administrative, legislative, or executive body, or that of a political subdivision, created or authorized under the constitution or laws of this state or of the United States.

(b) Intimidation; harassment. — It is unlawful for a person to use intimidation, physical force, harassment, or a fraudulent legal process or official proceeding, or to threaten or to attempt to do so, with the intent to:

(1) Impede or obstruct a public official or employee from performing his or her official duties;

(2) Impede or obstruct a juror or witness from performing his or her official duties in an official proceeding;

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(3) Influence, delay, or prevent the testimony of any person in an official proceeding; or

(4) Cause or induce a person to: (A) Withhold testimony, or withhold a record, document or other object from an official proceeding; (B) Alter, destroy, mutilate, or conceal a record, document, or other object impairing its integrity or availability for use in an official proceeding; (C) Evade an official proceeding summoning a person to appear as a witness or produce a record, document, or other object for an official proceeding; or (D) Be absent from an official proceeding to which such person has been summoned.

(c) Retaliation. — It is unlawful for a person to cause injury or loss to person or property, or to threaten or to attempt to do so, with the intent to:

(1) Retaliate against a public official or employee for the performance or nonperformance of an official duty;

(2) Retaliate against a juror or witness for performing his or her official duties in an official proceeding; or

(3) Retaliate against any other person for attending, testifying, or participating in an official proceeding, or for the production of any record, document, or other object produced by a person in an official proceeding.

(d) Penalty. — A person convicted of an offense under subsections (b) or (c) of this section is guilty of a felony and shall be confined in a state correctional facility not less than one nor more than 10 years, fined not more than $2,000, or both fined and confined.

(e) Civil cause of action. — A person who violates this section is liable in a civil action to any person harmed by the violation for injury or loss to person or property incurred as a result of the commission of the offense and for reasonable attorney's fees, court costs, and other expenses incurred as a result of prosecuting a civil action commenced under this subsection, which is not the exclusive remedy of a person who suffers injury or loss to person or property as a result of a violation of this section.

(f) Civil sanctions. — In addition to the criminal and civil penalties set forth in this section, any fraudulent official proceeding or legal process brought in a tribunal of this state in violation of this section shall be dismissed by the tribunal and the person may be ordered to reimburse the aggrieved person for reasonable attorney's fees, court costs, and other expenses incurred in defending or dismissing such action.

(1) Refusal to record. — A recorder may refuse to record a clearly fraudulent lien or other legal process against a public official or employee or his or her property. The recorder does not have a duty to inspect or investigate whether a lien or other legal process is fraudulent, nor is the recorder liable for refusing to record a lien or other legal process that the recorder believes is in violation of this section; and

(2) If a fraudulent lien or other legal process against a public official or employee or his or

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her property is recorded then:

(A) Request to release lien. — The public official or employee may send a written request by certified mail to the person who filed the fraudulent lien or legal process requesting the person to release or dismiss the lien or legal process. If such lien or legal process is not properly released or dismissed within 21 days, then it shall be inferred that the person intended to harass the public official or employee in violation of subsection (b) of this section and shall be subject to the criminal penalties in subsection (d) of this section and any other remedies provided in this section; or

(B) Notice of fraudulent lien. — A government attorney on behalf of the public official or employee may record a notice of fraudulent lien or legal process with the recorder who accepted the lien or legal process for filing. Such notice shall invalidate the fraudulent lien or legal process and cause it to be removed from the records. No filing fee shall be charged for the filing of the notice.

(f) A person's lack of belief in the jurisdiction or authority of this state or of the United States is no defense to prosecution of a civil or criminal action under this section.

(g)(1) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits the lawful acts of legitimate public officials or employees;

(2) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits a person's lawful and legitimate right to freely assemble, express opinions, or designate group affiliation; or

(3) Nothing in this section prohibits or in any way limits a person's lawful and legitimate access to a tribunal of this state or prevents a person from instituting or responding to a lawful action.

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