



## **SB496: Criminal Law – Interference With a Public Safety Answering Point – Penalties**

### **Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Friday, February 9, 12:00 PM**

### **Mission Critical Partners in support of SB496**

I represent Mission Critical Partners, a professional services firm assisting public safety agencies nationwide to enhance their 911 systems and operations. With over 30 years of experience in 911, I urge you to support SB496 to strengthen penalties for disrupting 911 services.

Recent years have seen an alarming rise in cyberattacks on public safety answering points (PSAPs) and emergency communications centers (ECCs). These include distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks that flood networks and block access, telephone denial of service (TDoS) attacks that inundate 911 lines, and caller ID spoofing. The harm caused can be severe—potentially blocking 911 access during a terrorist attack or natural disaster and putting lives at risk.

Our nation’s critical infrastructure is under constant attack and “bad actors” are increasingly targeting local governments, including PSAPs. While some communities, including those across the State of Maryland, are taking proactive steps to reduce cyberattacks, more must be done to protect mission critical 911 operations, including strengthening penalties for those convicted of interrupting or impairing PSAP operations.

Generally, DDoS attacks are intended to block public access to an online service by flooding it with junk data or repeated requests from multiple, and often compromising sources, thereby rendering legitimate access impossible. DDoS attacks are increasing in quantity, breadth, and sophistication. Some attacks have gone as far as demanding a ransom to terminate the attack.

Government agencies are also experiencing “reciprocal effects” from non-government targeted DDoS attacks. In late 2014, upset with the creation of homeless ordinances by the city of Fort Lauderdale, the hacker collectively known as “Anonymous” carried out its threats to implement a DDoS attack for the city’s online presences. By doing so, three of the 18 PSAPs in Palm Beach County, FL were overwhelmed with DDoS traffic because the county’s 911 networking systems were housed in the same facility as the city’s public website servers.

Similarly, a TDoS attack is a deluge of malicious inbound calls that target PSAPs, typically on non-emergency (10-digit) lines, which are also answered by 911 specialists (who are not already answering 911 calls). There is significant concern within the 911 and first responder community that a TDoS, coupled or coordinated with a physical terrorist attack or a DDoS attack, would amplify the disruption and place lives at risk. True emergency calls from citizens would not be able to be answered as 911 personnel deal with a flood of automated false calls.

Due to advances in telecommunications services, TDoS attackers have nearly unlimited access to voice over internet protocol (VoIP) services that can easily generate hundreds and thousands of simultaneous

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false calls into 911 centers, quickly overwhelming 911 personnel. These VoIP services can also spoof caller identification information and use computer-generated voice that makes it difficult and time consuming to differentiate false call from legitimate (and human) callers.

Penalties under current Maryland law for crimes involving telecommunications and electronics (§ 7-302) are insufficient deterrence when compared with the gravity of impairing our 911 systems. As a result, I support the recommendation of adding the following penalties:

- Someone attempting to interrupt or impair the function of a PSAP would be subject to imprisonment up to 5 years and/or a fine up to \$25,000; and
- An individual who successfully interrupts or impairs PSAP operations could be imprisoned for up to 10 years and/or a fine up to \$50,000.

As a deterrent and illustration, stricter penalties for these events must be implemented with consequences to reflect the crime. I thank you for hearing these concerns, applaud you for taking action on this issue, and urge support of SB496.

Respectfully submitted,

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