

## Mass. swatting bill gets attention after uptick in incidents this week

A rash of swatting incidents in Massachusetts this week may motivate state lawmakers to pick up a bill that increases the penalties for reporting false emergency situations in the state.

Massachusetts state rep. David T. Vieira (R-East Falmouth) put forth a bill in January that would increase the penalties for anyone convicted of acts related to "swatting." Bill H.1649 would amend Section 14B of chapter 269 of the Massachusetts General Laws to add stronger penalties for anyone engaging in reporting a false emergency situation including fines and jail time. The amendment is three paragraphs long and addresses three levels of punishment, depending on what happens when police respond to a fake emergency.



If police respond to a fake emergency and no one is injured, the punishment would be *"imprisonment in the house of correction for not more than 2 ½ years, or by a fine of not more than \$2,500, or by both such fine and imprisonment."* If convicted of the crime a second time, the individual would be subject to *"imprisonment in the house of correction for not more than 2 ½ years or by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than 5 years or by a fine of not more than \$7,500, or by both such fine and imprisonment."*

Should a swatting call result in the bodily injury of anyone involved, the punishment increases substantially. Those convicted in this category face *"imprisonment in the house of correction for not more than 2 ½ years, or by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than 5 years, by a fine of not more than \$5,000 or by both such fine and imprisonment."* A second conviction in this category will result in *"imprisonment in the house of correction for not more than 2 ½ years or by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than 10 years or by a fine of not more than \$10,000, or by both such fine and imprisonment."*

Finally, if a swatting call results in the death of anyone involved (police or a resident), the person convicted of the crime will be charged with manslaughter under Chapter 265 Section 13.

The bill was sent to the Joint Committee on The Judiciary (a committee made up of both House and Senate members) on January 20 and awaits a formal hearing.

While Bill H.1649 has been stalled since January, the increasing amount of swatting incidents in Massachusetts over the last week or so has given Vieira's proposed amendment a new lease on life. Chances are it will see some movement in the weeks and months ahead.

We will continue to follow the progress of this bill.