

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #: HB 117

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:

SPONSOR(S): Watson, B. and others

114 Y's

1 N's

**COMPANION
BILLS:** SB 1010

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Pending

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 117 passed the House on April 24, 2015, as SB 1010.

Section 843.08, F.S., makes it a third degree felony for a person to falsely assume or pretend to be a specified officer and take it upon himself or herself to act as such officer, or to require any other person to aid or assist him or her in a matter pertaining to the duty of any such an officer. The offense is reclassified to a second degree felony or a first degree felony in specified instances.

Section 843.085, F.S., makes it a first degree misdemeanor for a person to own or operate a motor vehicle marked or identified in any manner by words or insignia that could deceive a reasonable person into believing the vehicle is authorized by a law enforcement agency for use by the person operating the vehicle. The prohibited words and insignia include words such as "police," "patrolman," "sheriff," and "deputy."

The bill amends s. 843.08, F.S., to add "firefighter" and a "fire or arson investigator of the Department of Financial Services" to the list of officers that may not be falsely personated. The bill expands the application of s. 843.085, F.S., to prohibit a person from:

- Wearing or displaying the word "fire department" on any authorized indicia of authority, including any badge, insignia, emblem, identification card, or uniform, or any colorable imitation thereof;
- Marking or identifying a vehicle by the word "fire department," or any lettering, marking, insignia, or colorable imitation thereof; and
- Selling, transferring, or giving away the authorized badge, or colorable imitation thereof, including miniatures which bear the word "fire department."

The bill addresses a 2005 Florida Supreme Court decision by requiring proof that the offender had the intent to mislead or cause another person to believe (rather than requiring proof that a reasonable person could be deceived) that the:

- Person is a member of that agency or is authorized to wear or display such item; or
- Vehicle is an official vehicle of that agency and is authorized to be used by that agency.

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference (CJIC) met February 27, 2015, and determined this bill will have a positive insignificant impact on state prison beds. This means CJIC estimates that this bill may increase the department's prison bed population by less than 10 inmates annually. Additionally, to the extent the bill results in additional people being prosecuted as a result of the expanded application of the misdemeanor offense, the bill may have a positive jail bed impact on local governments.

Subject to the Governor's veto powers, the effective date of the bill is October 1, 2015.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

False Personation of an Officer or Others

Section 843.08, F.S., makes it a third degree felony¹ for a person to falsely assume or pretend to be a specified officer and take it upon himself or herself to act as such officer, or to require any other person to aid or assist him or her in a matter pertaining to the duty of any such an officer.² This section applies to the false personation of the following:

- A sheriff or deputy sheriff;
- Officers of the Florida Highway Patrol;
- Officers of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission;
- Officers of the Department of Transportation;
- Officers of the Department of Financial Services;
- Officers of the Department of Corrections;
- Correctional probation officers;
- State Attorneys, assistant state attorneys, and state attorney investigators;
- The Statewide Prosecutor and assistant statewide prosecutors;
- Coroners;
- Police officers;
- Lottery special agents and lottery investigators;
- Beverage enforcement agents;
- Watchman;
- Members of the Commission on Offender Review and any administrative aid or supervisor employed by the Commission on Offender Review;
- Any personnel or representative of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE); and
- Federal law enforcement officers as defined in s. 901.1505, F.S.

If a person falsely personates any of the above listed officers during the commission of a felony, the offense is reclassified to a second degree felony.³ If the commission of a felony results in the death or injury of another person, the offense is reclassified to a first degree felony.⁴

Currently, the term “watchman” is not defined.

Effect of the Bill

The bill amends s. 843.08, F.S., to add “firefighter” and a “fire or arson investigator of the Department of Financial Services” to the list of officers described above, and defines the term “watchman” as a security officer licensed under ch. 493, F.S.⁵ The bill also removes the reference to “officer of the Department of Transportation” since these officers were consolidated with the Florida Highway Patrol.

The bill amends the title of this offense to “false personation” and makes conforming changes in s. 921.0022, F.S., to reflect this title change.

Unlawful Use of Police Badges or Other Indicia of Authority

¹ A third degree felony is punishable by up to five years imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. ss. 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

² s. 843.08, F.S.

³ A second felony is punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine. ss. 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

⁴ A first degree felony is punishable by up to 30 years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine. ss. 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

⁵ Section 493.6101(19), F.S., defines a “security officer” as armored car personnel, personnel engaged in the transportation of prisoners, or any individual who, for consideration:

- Advertises as providing or performs bodyguard services or otherwise guards persons or property;
- Attempts to prevent theft or unlawful taking of goods, wares, and merchandise; or
- Attempts to prevent the misappropriation or concealment of goods, wares or merchandise, money, bonds, stocks, choses in action, notes, or other documents, papers, and articles of value or procurement of the return thereof.

Unlawful use of Police Badges

Section 843.085(1), F.S., makes it a first degree misdemeanor,⁶ for a person, unless authorized by the appropriate agency, to wear or display any authorized indicia of authority including any badge, insignia, emblem, identification card, or uniform, or any colorable imitation thereof of a law enforcement agency which could deceive a reasonable person into believing that such item is authorized by the agency for use by the person displaying or wearing it.

The subsection also prohibits a person from wearing or displaying any item which displays the word "police," "patrolman," "agent," "sheriff," "deputy," "trooper," "highway patrol," "commission officer," "Wildlife Officer," "Marine Patrol Officer," "state attorney," "public defender," "marshal," "constable," or "bailiff" and which could deceive a reasonable person into believing that such item is authorized by the agency for use by the person displaying or wearing it.

Operating a Vehicle Marked as a Law Enforcement Vehicle

Section 843.085(2), F.S., makes it a first degree misdemeanor for a person to own or operate a motor vehicle marked or identified in any manner or combination (marked vehicle) by words or insignia which could deceive a reasonable person into believing that the vehicle is authorized by a law enforcement agency for use by the person operating the vehicle.⁷ The prohibited words and insignia include:

- The word or words "police," "patrolman," "sheriff," "deputy," "trooper," "highway patrol," "commission officer," "Wildlife Officer," "Marine Patrol Officer," "marshal," "constable," or "bailiff," or
- Any lettering, marking, or insignia or colorable imitation thereof, including, but not limited to, stars, badges, or shields, officially used to identify the marked vehicle as a federal, state, county, or municipal law enforcement vehicle or a vehicle used by a criminal justice agency.⁸

Section 843.085(2), F.S., does not apply if:

- The marked vehicle is owned or operated by the appropriate agency and its use is authorized by such agency;
- The local law enforcement agency authorizes the use of the marked vehicle; or
- The person is appointed by the Governor pursuant to ch. 354, F.S.⁹

An exception is also provided to allow fraternal, benevolent, or labor organizations or associations (fraternal association), to use any of the following words in the official name of the organization or association:

- "Police," "patrolman," "sheriff," "deputy," "trooper," "highway patrol," "commission officer," "Wildlife Officer," "Marine Patrol Officer," "marshal," "constable," or "bailiff."¹⁰

Selling Badges

Currently, s. 843.085(3), F.S., makes it a first degree misdemeanor to sell, transfer, or give away the authorized badge, or colorable imitation thereof of any criminal justice agency or bearing words "police," "patrolman," "sheriff," "deputy," "trooper," "highway patrol," "commission officer," "Wildlife Officer,"

⁶ A first degree misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year in county jail and a \$1,000 fine. ss. 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

⁷ s. 843.085(2), F.S.

⁸ Section 943.045, F.S., defines the term "criminal justice agency" as a court, FDLE, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the protective investigations component of the Department of Children and Family Services, which investigates the crimes of abuse and neglect, and any other governmental agency or subunit thereof which performs the administration of criminal justice pursuant to a statute or rule of court and which allocates a substantial part of its annual budget to the administration of criminal justice.

⁹ Chapter 354, F.S., requires the Governor to appoint one or more persons who have met specified law enforcement qualifications and training requirements as special officers for the protection and safety of railroads and common carriers; their passengers and employees; and the property of such carriers, passengers, and employees.

¹⁰ s. 843.085(4), F.S.

“Marine Patrol Officer,” “marshal,” “constable,” “agent,” “state attorney,” “public defender,” or “bailiff,” which could deceive a reasonable person into believing that such item is authorized by the agency.¹¹

Sult v. State

In *Sult v. State*,¹² the Florida Supreme Court held that s. 843.085, F.S., was unconstitutionally overbroad and vague. The court found the statute unconstitutional because it did not require that the offender had a specific intent to deceive and it made no distinction between innocent wearing of law enforcement items and wearing of these items in order to deceive the public into believing the wearer was a member of the law enforcement agency. The court found:

With no specific intent-to-deceive element, the section extends its prohibitions to innocent wearing and displaying of specified words. The reach of the statute is not tailored toward the legitimate public purpose of prohibiting conduct intended to deceive the public into believing law enforcement impersonators. The could deceive a reasonable person element of section 843.085(1), in conjunction with the prohibition of a display in any manner or combination of words listed in the statute, results in a virtually boundless and uncertain restriction on expression. Thus...[the section] is overbroad because it reaches a substantial amount of constitutionally protected conduct.¹³

Effect of the Bill

The bill expands the application of s. 843.085, F.S., to prohibit a person from:

- Wearing or displaying the word “fire department” on any authorized indicia of authority, including any badge, insignia, emblem, identification card, or uniform, or any colorable imitation thereof;
- Marking or identifying a vehicle by the word “fire department,” or any lettering, marking, insignia, or colorable imitation thereof; and
- Selling, transferring, or giving away the authorized badge, or colorable imitation thereof, including miniatures which bear the word “fire department.”

The bill addresses the *Sult v. State* decision by requiring proof that the offender had the intent to mislead or cause another person to believe (rather than requiring proof that a reasonable person could be deceived) that the:

- Person is a member of that agency or is authorized to wear or display such item; or
- Vehicle is an official vehicle of that agency and is authorized to be used by that agency.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

¹¹ Section 843.085(3), F.S., provides an exception for “agency purchases or upon the presentation and recordation of both a driver’s license and other identification showing any transferee to actually be a member of such criminal justice agency or unless the person is appointed by the Governor pursuant to chapter 354.” A transferor of an item covered by this subsection is required to maintain for 2 years a written record of the transaction, including records showing compliance with this subsection, and if such transferor is a business, it must make such records available during normal business hours for inspection by any law enforcement agency having jurisdiction in the area where the business is located. Violation of this provision is a first degree misdemeanor. The bill does not change this provision.

¹² 906 So. 2d 1013 (Fla. 2005).

¹³ *Id.* at 1021.

The bill does not appear to have any impact on state revenues.

2. Expenditures:

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference (CJIC) met February 27, 2015, and determined this bill will have a positive insignificant impact on state prison beds. This means CJIC estimates that this bill may increase the department's prison bed population by less than 10 inmates annually. False personation under s. 843.08 F.S., is a third degree felony ranked in level two of the Criminal Punishment Code ranking chart. In Fiscal Year 2013-14, 29 offenders were sentenced for this offense with three receiving a prison sentence. The average prison sentence for this offense is 24 months with an incarceration rate of 10 percent per offenders sentenced.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

The bill does not appear to have any impact on local government revenues.

2. Expenditures:

The bill may also have a negative jail bed impact on local governments because it expands the application of s. 843.085, F.S., a first degree misdemeanor, to include vehicles marked or identified by the word "fire department," or any lettering, marking, insignia, or colorable imitation thereof.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.