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AB-1637 Criminal profiteering: asset forfeiture: unemployment and disability insurance fraud. (2021-2022)

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Assembly Bill No. 1637

CHAPTER 950

An act to amend Sections 186.2 and 186.8 of the Penal Code, relating to criminal profiteering, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

[Approved by Governor September 30, 2022. Filed with Secretary of State September 30, 2022.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1637, Cooper. Criminal profiteering: asset forfeiture: unemployment and disability insurance fraud.

Existing law, the California Control of Profits of Organized Crime Act, provides the procedure for the forfeiture of property and proceeds acquired through a pattern of criminal profiteering activity, as specified. Under existing law, criminal profiteering activity is defined as certain acts or threats made for financial gain or advantage that may be charged as specified crimes, including, among others, offenses relating to insurance fraud.

This bill would include fraud offenses relating to COVID-19 pandemic-related insurance programs administered by the Employment Development Department within the definition of criminal profiteering activity for the purposes of these provisions. The bill would require proceeds collected under these provisions to be returned to the Employment Development Department. By increasing the burdens on local prosecuting agencies, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.

Vote: 2/3 Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 186.2 of the Penal Code is amended to read:

186.2. For purposes of this chapter, the following definitions apply:

(a) "Criminal profiteering activity" means an act committed or attempted or a threat made for financial gain or advantage, which act or threat may be charged as a crime under any of the following sections:

(1) Arson, as defined in Section 451.

- (2) Bribery, as defined in Sections 67, 67.5, and 68.
- (3) Child pornography or exploitation, as defined in subdivision (b) of Section 311.2, or Section 311.3 or 311.4, which may be prosecuted as a felony.
- (4) Felonious assault, as defined in Section 245.
- (5) Embezzlement, as defined in Sections 424 and 503.
- (6) Extortion, as defined in Section 518.
- (7) Forgery, as defined in Section 470.
- (8) Gambling, as defined in Sections 320, 321, 322, 323, 326, 330a, 330b, 330c, 330.1, 330.4, 337a to 337f, inclusive, and Section 337i, except the activities of a person who participates solely as an individual bettor.
- (9) Kidnapping, as defined in Section 207.
- (10) Mayhem, as defined in Section 203.
- (11) Murder, as defined in Section 187.
- (12) Pimping and pandering, as defined in Section 266.
- (13) Receiving stolen property, as defined in Section 496.
- (14) Robbery, as defined in Section 211.
- (15) Solicitation of crimes, as defined in Section 653f.
- (16) Grand theft, as defined in Section 487 or subdivision (a) of Section 487a.
- (17) Trafficking in controlled substances, as defined in Sections 11351, 11352, and 11353 of the Health and Safety Code.
- (18) Violation of the laws governing corporate securities, as defined in Section 25541 of the Corporations Code.
- (19) Offenses contained in Chapter 7.5 (commencing with Section 311) of Title 9, relating to obscene matter, or in Chapter 7.6 (commencing with Section 313) of Title 9, relating to harmful matter that may be prosecuted as a felony.
- (20) Presentation of a false or fraudulent claim, as defined in Section 550.
- (21) False or fraudulent activities, schemes, or artifices, as described in Section 14107 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.
- (22) Money laundering, as defined in Section 186.10.
- (23) Offenses relating to the counterfeit of a registered mark, as specified in Section 350, or offenses relating to piracy, as specified in Section 653w.
- (24) Offenses relating to the unauthorized access to computers, computer systems, and computer data, as specified in Section 502.
- (25) Conspiracy to commit any of the crimes listed above, as defined in Section 182.
- (26) Subdivision (a) of Section 186.22, or a felony subject to enhancement as specified in subdivision (b) of Section 186.22.
- (27) Offenses related to fraud or theft against the state's beverage container recycling program, including, but not limited to, those offenses specified in this subdivision and those criminal offenses specified in the California Beverage Container Recycling and Litter Reduction Act (Division 12.1 (commencing with Section 14500) of the Public Resources Code).
- (28) Human trafficking, as defined in Section 236.1.
- (29) A crime in which the perpetrator induces, encourages, or persuades a person under 18 years of age to engage in a commercial sex act. For purposes of this paragraph, a commercial sex act means any sexual conduct on account of which anything of value is given or received by any person.
- (30) A crime in which the perpetrator, through force, fear, coercion, deceit, violence, duress, menace, or threat of unlawful injury to the victim or to another person, causes a person under 18 years of age to engage in a commercial sex act. For purposes of

this paragraph, a commercial sex act means any sexual conduct on account of which anything of value is given or received by any person.

(31) Theft of personal identifying information, as defined in Section 530.5.

(32) Offenses involving the theft of a motor vehicle, as specified in Section 10851 of the Vehicle Code.

(33) Abduction or procurement by fraudulent inducement for prostitution, as defined in Section 266a.

(34) (A) Offenses relating to insurance fraud as specified in Sections 2106, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2110.3, 2110.5, 2110.7, and 2117 of the Unemployment Insurance Code.

(B) Fraud offenses relating to COVID-19 pandemic-related insurance programs administered by the Employment Development Department. For the purposes of this subparagraph, "fraud offenses" includes the offenses specified in subparagraph (A).

(b) (1) "Pattern of criminal profiteering activity" means engaging in at least two incidents of criminal profiteering, as defined by this chapter, that meet the following requirements:

(A) Have the same or a similar purpose, result, principals, victims, or methods of commission, or are otherwise interrelated by distinguishing characteristics.

(B) Are not isolated events.

(C) Were committed as a criminal activity of organized crime.

(2) Acts that would constitute a "pattern of criminal profiteering activity" shall not be used by a prosecuting agency to seek the remedies provided by this chapter unless the underlying offense occurred after the effective date of this chapter and the prior act occurred within 10 years, excluding any period of imprisonment, of the commission of the underlying offense. A prior act shall not be used by a prosecuting agency to seek remedies provided by this chapter if a prosecution for that act resulted in an acquittal.

(c) "Prosecuting agency" means the Attorney General or the district attorney of any county.

(d) "Organized crime" means crime that is of a conspiratorial nature and that is either of an organized nature and seeks to supply illegal goods or services such as narcotics, prostitution, pimping and pandering, loan-sharking, counterfeiting of a registered mark in violation of Section 350, the piracy of a recording or audiovisual work in violation of Section 653w, gambling, and pornography, or that, through planning and coordination of individual efforts, seeks to conduct the illegal activities of arson for profit, hijacking, insurance fraud, smuggling, operating vehicle theft rings, fraud against the beverage container recycling program, embezzlement, securities fraud, insurance fraud in violation of the provisions listed in paragraph (34) of subdivision (a), grand theft, money laundering, forgery, or systematically encumbering the assets of a business for the purpose of defrauding creditors. "Organized crime" also means crime committed by a criminal street gang, as defined in subdivision (f) of Section 186.22. "Organized crime" also means false or fraudulent activities, schemes, or artifices, as described in Section 14107 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and the theft of personal identifying information, as defined in Section 530.5.

(e) "Underlying offense" means an offense enumerated in subdivision (a) for which the defendant is being prosecuted.

SEC. 2. Section 186.8 of the Penal Code is amended to read:

186.8. Notwithstanding that no response or claim has been filed pursuant to Section 186.5, in all cases where property is forfeited pursuant to this chapter and, if necessary, sold by the Department of General Services or local governmental entity, the money forfeited or the proceeds of sale shall be distributed by the state or local governmental entity as follows:

(a) To the bona fide or innocent purchaser, conditional sales vendor, or holder of a valid lien, mortgage, or security interest, if any, up to the amount of their interest in the property or proceeds, when the court declaring the forfeiture orders a distribution to that person. The court shall endeavor to discover all those lienholders and protect their interests and may, at its discretion, order the proceeds placed in escrow for up to an additional 60 days to ensure that all valid claims are received and processed.

(b) To the Department of General Services or local governmental entity for all expenditures made or incurred by it in connection with the sale of the property, including expenditures for any necessary repairs, storage, or transportation of any property seized under this chapter.

(c) To the General Fund of the state or a general fund of a local governmental entity, whichever prosecutes.

(d) In any case involving a violation of subdivision (b) of Section 311.2, or Section 311.3 or 311.4, in lieu of the distribution of the proceeds provided for by subdivisions (b) and (c), the proceeds shall be deposited in the county children's trust fund, established

pursuant to Section 18966 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, of the county that filed the petition of forfeiture. If the county does not have a children's trust fund, the funds shall be deposited in the State Children's Trust Fund, established pursuant to Section 18969 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.

(e) In any case involving crimes against the state beverage container recycling program, in lieu of the distribution of proceeds provided in subdivision (c), the proceeds shall be deposited in the penalty account established pursuant to subdivision (d) of Section 14580 of the Public Resources Code, except that a portion of the proceeds equivalent to the cost of prosecution in the case shall be distributed to the local prosecuting entity that filed the petition of forfeiture.

(f) (1) In any case described in paragraph (29) or (30) of subdivision (a) of Section 186.2, or paragraph (33) of subdivision (a) of Section 186.2 where the victim is a minor, in lieu of the distribution provided for in subdivision (c), the proceeds shall be deposited in the Victim-Witness Assistance Fund to be available for appropriation to fund child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse victim counseling centers and prevention programs under Section 13837. Fifty percent of the funds deposited in the Victim-Witness Assistance Fund pursuant to this subdivision shall be granted to community-based organizations that serve minor victims of human trafficking.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), any proceeds specified in paragraph (1) that would otherwise be distributed to the General Fund of the state under subdivision (c) pursuant to a paragraph in subdivision (a) of Section 186.2 other than paragraph (29) or (30) of subdivision (a) of Section 186.2, or paragraph (33) of subdivision (a) of Section 186.2 where the victim is a minor, shall, except as otherwise required by law, continue to be distributed to the General Fund of the state as specified in subdivision (c).

(g) In any case described in subparagraph (B) of paragraph (34) of subdivision (a) of Section 186.2, in lieu of the distribution provided for in subdivision (c), the proceeds shall be returned to the Employment Development Department.

SEC. 3. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.

SEC. 4. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the California Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

In order to protect the health and wellness of California residents by deterring fraudulent unemployment and disability insurance claims, thereby preserving the availability of benefits for eligible claimants, it is necessary that this measure take effect immediately.