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SB-281 Crimes: aggravated arson. (2023-2024)

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Senate Bill No. 281

CHAPTER 706

An act to amend Section 451.5 of the Penal Code, relating to arson.

[Approved by Governor October 10, 2023. Filed with Secretary of State October 10, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 281, McGuire. Crimes: aggravated arson.

Existing law, until January 1, 2024, defines the offense of aggravated arson, and defines the aggravating factors for the offense as, the person has been previously convicted of arson on one or more occasions within the past 10 years, the fire caused property damage and other losses in excess of \$8,300,000, or the fire caused damage to, or the destruction of, 5 or more inhabited structures. Existing law, commencing January 1, 2024, deletes the aggravating factor of property damage and other losses in excess of \$8,300,000 from the definition of aggravated arson.

This bill would increase the dollar amount of property damages and other losses required to be an aggravating factor to \$10,100,000, exclusive of damage to, or destruction of, inhabited dwellings. The bill would extend the operation of the former aggravated arson offense until January 1, 2029. The bill would delay operation of the latter aggravated arson offense that deletes the threshold dollar amount of property damages and other losses as an aggravating factor until January 1, 2029. By extending the operation of law defining a crime, 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.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

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

SECTION 1. Section 451.5 of the Penal Code, as amended by Section 1 of Chapter 619 of the Statutes of 2018, is amended to read:

451.5. (a) A person who willfully, maliciously, deliberately, with premeditation, and with intent to cause injury to one or more persons, or to cause damage to property under circumstances likely to produce injury to one or more persons, or to cause damage to one or more structures or inhabited dwellings, sets fire to, burns, or causes to be burned, or aids, counsels, or procures the burning of any residence, structure, forest land, or property, is guilty of aggravated arson if one or more of the following aggravating factors exists:

(1) The defendant has been previously convicted of arson on one or more occasions within the past 10 years.

(2) (A) The fire caused property damage and other losses in excess of ten million one hundred thousand dollars (\$10,100,000), exclusive of damage to, or destruction of, inhabited dwellings.

(B) In calculating the total amount of property damage and other losses under subparagraph (A), the court shall consider the cost of fire suppression. It is the intent of the Legislature that this paragraph be reviewed within five years to consider the effects of inflation on the dollar amount stated herein.

(3) The fire caused damage to, or the destruction of, five or more inhabited dwellings.

(b) A person who is convicted under subdivision (a) shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for 10 years to life.

(c) A person who is sentenced under subdivision (b) shall not be eligible for release on parole until 10 calendar years have elapsed.

(d) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2029, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 2. Section 451.5 of the Penal Code, as amended by Section 2 of Chapter 619 of the Statutes of 2018, is amended to read:

451.5. (a) A person who willfully, maliciously, deliberately, with premeditation, and with intent to cause injury to one or more persons, or to cause damage to property under circumstances likely to produce injury to one or more persons, or to cause damage to one or more structures or inhabited dwellings, sets fire to, burns, or causes to be burned, or aids, counsels, or procures the burning of any residence, structure, forest land, or property, is guilty of aggravated arson if either of the following aggravating factors exists:

(1) The defendant has been previously convicted of arson on one or more occasions within the past 10 years.

(2) The fire caused damage to, or the destruction of, five or more inhabited dwellings.

(b) A person who is convicted under subdivision (a) shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for 10 years to life.

(c) A person who is sentenced under subdivision (b) shall not be eligible for release on parole until 10 calendar years have elapsed.

(d) This section shall become operative on January 1, 2029.

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.