

House Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Committee

February 3rd, 2025

Bill: 1st substitute HB 140 – Assault Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Jon Hawkins

Floor Sponsor: Undeclared

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill concerns an assault or threat of violence committed against a referee.

Discussion: Representative Hawkins presented the 1st substitute, which was adopted by the Committee. He said that this legislation is being run in response to the increasing assaults on referees by parents. Jeff Cleff, representing the Utah High School Activities Association, spoke in support of the Bill and highlighted incidents where fans have followed officials to locker rooms and, in some cases, physically assaulted them. He noted that unclear provisions in the law have made it difficult to prosecute these cases. Many officials have chosen to resign due to safety concerns. This Bill establishes an aggravating factor to be considered during sentencing when an individual is found guilty of assault or threats of violence committed against a referee.

Representative Gwynn asked whether the enhancement would be applied immediately by law enforcement when the arrest is made or would the aggravating factor be applied only after a charge was filed. The sponsor answered that it would be applied during sentencing.

Representative Hall inquired whether the Bill applied solely to referees or to assaults in general. Representative Hawkins clarified that the Bill specifically adds the aggravating enhancement for assault or threats committed against officials and referees. The President of the Utah Chiefs of Police Association and former referees spoke in support of the Bill. Representatives Gwynn and Wilcox also expressed support. There was no further public comment or discussion.

Yeas: 7

Nays: 0

N/V: 4

Outcome: 1st substitute HB 140 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 1st substitute HB 271 – Meeting or Procession Disruption Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Mac MacPherson

Floor Sponsor: Undeclared

UASD Position: Support

This Bill modifies the criminal offense concerning disrupting a meeting or procession.

Discussion: Representative MacPherson presented the 1st substitute, which was adopted by the Committee. The sponsor said that this legislation was prompted by reports of protesters taunting churchgoers and blocking access to their place of worship. The Bill clarifies the mens rea requirement by changing “intending to disrupt” to “intentionally or knowingly”. It is extremely difficult to prove intent. This Bill lowers that standard. It also refines the definition of criminal interference with processions or meetings. The sponsor emphasized that such disruptions violate the First Amendment right to assembly and that the Bill simply clarifies existing law. No one from the public commented on the Bill.

Yeas: 7

Nays: 0

N/V: 4

Outcome: 1st substitute HB 271 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
