

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Criminal Justice

BILL: SB 1112

INTRODUCER: Senator Abruzzo

SUBJECT: Sexting

DATE: March 20, 2015

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Sumner	Cannon	CJ	Pre-meeting
2.			ACJ	
3.			FP	

I. Summary:

SB 1112 amends s. 985.0301, F.S., to provide that the circuit court has exclusive original jurisdiction of proceeding in which a child is alleged to have committed a noncriminal violation that has been assigned to juvenile court by law.

The bill amends the punishment schedule for sexting in s. 847.0141, F.S., by including the issuance of a citation for first violations. The bill requires all court records and information obtained or produced in relation to a noncriminal sexting violation to be afforded the same level of confidentiality provided under ss. 985.04 and 985.045, F.S. All noncriminal sexting violations that occurred on or after October 1, 2011, are considered confidential.

II. Present Situation:

Sexting occurs when a minor knowingly uses a computer, or any other device capable of electronic data transmission or distribution, to transmit or distribute to another minor any photograph or video of any person which depicts nudity, as defined in s. 847.001(9), F.S., and is harmful to minors, as defined in s. 847.0016, F.S.

The term “nudity” is defined in s. 847.001(9), F.S., to mean:

[T]he showing of the human male or female genitals, pubic area, or buttocks with less than a fully opaque covering; or the showing of the female breast with less than a fully opaque covering of any portion thereof below the top of the nipple; or the depiction of covered male genitals in a discernibly turgid state. A mother’s breastfeeding of her baby does not under any circumstance constitute “nudity,” irrespective of whether or not the nipple is covered during or incidental to feeding.

Section 847.001(6), F.S., defines “harmful to minors” to mean:

[A]ny reproduction, imitation, characterization, description, exhibition, presentation, or representation, of whatever kind or form, depicting nudity, sexual conduct, or sexual excitement when it:

- (a) Predominantly appeals to a prurient, shameful, or morbid interest;
- (b) Is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the adult community as a whole with respect to what is suitable material or conduct for minors; and
- (c) Taken as a whole, is without serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors.

A mother’s breastfeeding of her baby is not under any circumstance “harmful to minors.”

The transmission or distribution of multiple photographs or videos is a single offense if the photographs or videos were transmitted or distributed within the same 24-hour period.

Following is the graduated punishment schedule for a violation of sexting:

- A first sexting violation is a noncriminal violation, punishable by eight hours of community service or, if ordered by the court in lieu of community service, a \$60 fine. The court may also order the minor to participate in suitable training or instruction in lieu of, or in addition to, the community service or fine.
- A sexting violation that occurs after being found to have committed a noncriminal violation for sexting is a first-degree misdemeanor. A first-degree misdemeanor is punishable by a jail term of not more than one year and may include a fine of not more than \$1,000.
- A sexting violation that occurs after being found to have committed a first-degree misdemeanor violation for sexting is an unranked third-degree felony. A third-degree felony is punishable by state imprisonment for not more than five years and may include a fine of not more than \$5,000. However, because the felony is unranked, the offender may be sentenced to a term of probation under supervision by the Department of Corrections.

The sexting provisions do not prohibit the prosecution of a minor for conduct relating to material that includes the depiction of sexual conduct or sexual excitement, and does not prohibit the prosecution of a minor for stalking under s. 784.048, F.S.

State v. C.M.

In January 2015, Florida’s Fourth District Court of Appeal (DCA) decided *State v. C.M.*¹ The case involved a minor who was charged via a delinquency petition with committing a first-time violation of the sexting statute – a noncriminal violation. At trial, the defense filed a motion to dismiss arguing that because the minor did not commit a delinquent act, she could not be subject to prosecution through a petition for delinquency. The trial court agreed and granted the motion.

On appeal, the Fourth DCA recognized that under the delinquency statutes, the state attorney files a petition for delinquency to obtain a finding that a child has committed a delinquent act or violation of law. The court held that because a first offense of sexting (a noncriminal violation)

¹ 154 So. 3d 1177 (Fla. 4th DCA 2015).

does not fit within the definition of “delinquent act” or “violation of law,” a petition for delinquency was not the proper method to prosecute such offense.

The state argued that the trial court’s dismissal left them without a remedy, and asserted that the court should authorize the use of a petition for delinquency because it was the only method to determine if a noncriminal first offense of sexting occurred. The Fourth DCA disagreed reasoning that courts “are not at liberty to add words to statutes that were not placed there by the Legislature.” The court went on to state:

[O]nly the legislature can add to the sexting statute to set out the procedure for the prosecution and determination if there has been a violation of the first offense. Until that is effectuated by the legislature, we are bound to the letter of the law and “must apply a statute as [we] find it, leaving to the legislature the correction of assorted inconsistencies and inequalities in its operation.”

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends the punishment schedule in s. 847.0141, F.S., by including the issuance of a citation for first violations. The bill specifies that for a first violation of sexting the minor must sign and accept a citation indicating a promise to appear before the juvenile court. In lieu of appearing in court, the minor may complete 8 hours of community service work, pay a \$60 civil penalty, or participate in a cyber-safety program, if such a program is locally available. The minor must satisfy any penalty within 30 days after receipt of the citation.

The citation must be in a form prescribed by the issuing law enforcement agency, must be signed by the minor, and must contain all of the following:

- The date and time of issuance;
- The name and address of the minor to whom the citation is issued;
- A thumbprint of the minor to whom the citation is issued;
- Identification of the noncriminal violation and the time it was committed;
- The facts constituting reasonable cause;
- The specific section of law violated;
- The name and authority of the citing officer;
- The procedures that the minor must follow to contest the citation, perform the required community service, pay the civil penalty, and participate in a cyber-safety program.

If the citation is contested and the court determines that the minor committed a noncriminal violation under this section, the court may order the minor to perform 8 hours of community service, pay a \$60 civil penalty, or participate in a cyber-safety program, or any combination thereof.

A minor who fails to comply with the citation waives the right to contest it and the court may impose any of the stated penalties or issue an order to show cause. Upon a finding of contempt, the court may impose additional age-appropriate penalties, which may include issuance of an order to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to withhold issuance of, or suspend the driver license or driving privilege of, the minor for 30 consecutive days. The court may not impose incarceration.

The bill requires all court records and information obtained or produced in relation to a noncriminal sexting violation to be afforded the same level of confidentiality provided under ss. 985.04 and 985.045, F.S. All noncriminal sexting violations that occurred on or after October 1, 2011, are considered confidential.

The bill also requires 80 percent of all civil penalties received by a juvenile court pursuant to the citation process outlined above to be remitted by the clerk of the court to the county commission to provide training on cyber safety for minors. The remaining 20 percent must remain with the clerk of the court to defray administrative costs.

The bill specifically addresses the holding in *State v. C.M.* by amending s. 985.0301, F.S., to provide that the circuit court has exclusive original jurisdiction of proceeding in which a child is alleged to have committed a noncriminal violation that has been assigned to juvenile court by law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill requires 80 percent of all civil penalties received by a juvenile court pursuant to the citation process be remitted by the clerk of the court to the county commission to provide training on cyber safety for minors

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 847.0141 and 985.0301.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
