

CRIMES CODE (18 PA.C.S.) - OFFENSE OF HARASSMENT

Act of Jul. 10, 2015, P.L. 140, No. 26

Cl. 18

Session of 2015

No. 2015-26

HB 229

AN ACT

Amending Title 18 (Crimes and Offenses) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in assault, further providing for the offense of harassment.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 2709(c)(2) and (f) of Title 18 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes are amended, subsection (b.1) is amended by adding a paragraph and the section is amended by adding a subsection to read:

§ 2709. Harassment.

* * *

(a.1) Cyber harassment of a child.--

(1) A person commits the crime of cyber harassment of a child if, with intent to harass, annoy or alarm, the person engages in a continuing course of conduct of making any of the following by electronic means directly to a child or by publication through an electronic social media service:

(i) seriously disparaging statement or opinion about the child's physical characteristics, sexuality, sexual activity or mental or physical health or condition; or

(ii) threat to inflict harm.

(2) (i) If a juvenile is charged with a violation of paragraph (1), the judicial authority with jurisdiction over the violation shall give first consideration to referring the juvenile charged with the violation to a diversionary program under Pa.R.J.C.P. No. 312 (relating to Informal Adjustment) or No. 370 (relating to Consent Decree). As part of the diversionary program, the judicial authority may order the juvenile to participate in an educational program which includes the legal and nonlegal consequences of cyber harassment.

(ii) If the person successfully completes the diversionary program, the juvenile's records of the charge of violating paragraph (1) shall be expunged as provided for under section 9123 (relating to juvenile records).

(b.1) Venue.--

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(3) In addition to paragraphs (1) and (2), an offense under subsection (a.1) may be deemed to have been committed at the place where the child who is the subject of the communication resides.

(c) Grading.--

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(2) An offense under subsection (a)(4), (5), (6) or (7) or **(a.1)** shall constitute a misdemeanor of the third degree.

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(f) Definitions.--As used in this section, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings given to them in this subsection:

"Communicates." Conveys a message without intent of legitimate communication or address by oral, nonverbal, written or electronic means, including telephone, electronic mail, Internet, facsimile, telex, wireless communication or similar transmission.

"Course of conduct." A pattern of actions composed of more than one act over a period of time, however short, evidencing a continuity of conduct. **The term includes lewd, lascivious, threatening or obscene words, language, drawings, caricatures or actions, either in person or anonymously.** Acts indicating a course of conduct which occur in more than one jurisdiction may be used by any other jurisdiction in which an act occurred as evidence of a continuing pattern of conduct or a course of conduct.

"Emotional distress." A temporary or permanent state of mental anguish.

"Family or household member." Spouses or persons who have been spouses, persons living as spouses or who lived as spouses, parents and children, other persons related by consanguinity or affinity, current or former sexual or intimate partners or persons who share biological parenthood.

"Seriously disparaging statement or opinion." A statement or opinion which is intended to and under the circumstances is reasonably likely to cause substantial emotional distress to a child of the victim's age and which produces some physical manifestation of the distress.

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

APPROVED--The 10th day of July, A.D. 2015.

TOM WOLF