

Trump assassination attempt spotlights California campaign security proposal

By Eric He

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California lawmakers are pushing a proposal to remove a cap on security-related campaign expenditures following the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump.

[Assembly Bill 2041](#) would eliminate a \$5,000 limit on campaign funds that candidates and elected officials can use on security and would instead allow them to use funds to pay “reasonable costs” for safety measures such as a home or office monitoring system, hiring personal security details for themselves, family and staff and other related “tangible” items.

Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) vetoed a [similar proposal last year](#) that had bipartisan support, but the bill’s author, Assemblymember [Mia Bonta](#) (D-Alameda) said in a statement that the assassination attempt on Trump emphasized the need for the measure.

Bonta said days after the assassination attempt that the events were “proof that political violence continues to plague our democracy and reaffirms to me that we urgently need to allow state candidates to invest in their safety and fund security for themselves, their families and their staff.”

WHAT’S IN THE BILL?

This Pro Bill Analysis is based on the [text of the bill](#) as amended on June 12.

The bill would repeal [Section 89517.5](#) of the state’s Government Code, which only allowed candidates and elected officials to use campaign funds for a home or office electronic security system if they experienced a verifiable threat to their physical safety. Current law also caps the amount of campaign funds that can be spent on security at \$5,000 (Sec. 1).

Instead, the bill would remove the limit on how much campaign funding can be spent on security expenses for a candidate or elected official, as well as their immediate family and staff — as long as the threat or potential threat stems from the person’s official duties (Sec. 2).

The measure would define a “security expense” as:

- Installing and monitoring an electronic security system
- Providing personal security details
- Any other “tangible item” related to security

The bill would explicitly prohibit the use of campaign funds for firearms, as well as payments to immediate relatives. There would be an exception for immediate relatives who own a professional personal security business, but the cost of the service would be no greater than what the relative would otherwise charge a routine customer.

A candidate would have to return to or reimburse their campaign the cost of the security system or other security-related items after the election, or when they sell the property where the security system is located — whichever is sooner. An elected official would have to return or reimburse those costs within a year of leaving office.

If candidates or elected officials face verifiable, continuous threats to their physical safety, they would have until a year after the threat has ceased or when they sell the property where the security system is located to reimburse their campaign, whichever is sooner.

The amount of the reimbursement would be the fair market value of the security system. Family members or staff would not be held personally liable for reimbursements.

The measure would require candidates and elected officials to report expenditures and maintain detailed records and receipts related to the measure, as well as evidence of the threat or potential threat that required security spending.

Any campaign-related expenditures spent pursuant to the measure would be considered an outstanding campaign debt or an elected official's expense and required to be disclosed to the Fair Political Practices Commission (Sec. 3).

The measure would require a two-thirds vote to pass because it [would amend the](#) Political Reform Act of 1974 (Sec. 4). It would contain an urgency clause to take effect immediately, citing a need to "safeguard California's democracy and ensure all eligible Californians can run for office without fear" (Sec. 5).

WHO ARE THE POWER PLAYERS?

Assemblymember **Mia Bonta** (D-Alameda) re-introduced the measure in February after Gov. **Gavin Newsom** vetoed it last year.

The bill's supporters include the **League of California Cities** and **Todd Spitzer**, the Republican District Attorney of Orange County. A lobbyist for Spitzer said at a June committee hearing that the former state lawmaker has faced threats throughout his political career, and has had to implement several security measures that cost more than the campaign funding limit under current law.

[In a letter](#), **Johnnie Pina**, a lobbyist for the League of California Cities, cited an increase in attacks on public officials in recent years.

"Unfortunately, city officials know all too well why this bill is necessary," Pina said. "The list of examples of recent incidents of attacks and harassment of local elected officials is unfortunately long."

There has been no formal opposition to the measure. The city of Beverly Hills [opposed last year's proposal](#) over removing the spending limit because of concerns that there would not be a cap on "reasonable expenses," but the city does not have a position this year after a change in mayorship.

The bill also has the approval of the state's ethics watchdog, which worked closely with Bonta on language. **Adam Silver**, chair of the **Fair Political Practices Commission**, told POLITICO in a statement that the commission is "naturally hesitant to support any legislation that expands the permissible use of campaign funds," but that "it is an unfortunate reality that elected officials and their families report facing an unprecedented threat of physical violence on a daily basis."

Silver said the commission believes the measure "addresses this serious public safety concern without undermining the Legislature and voters' intent to strictly limit the use of campaign funds."

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR?

Newsom vetoed a [similar measure from Bonta last year](#), saying it defined an allowable security expense too broadly despite the bill easily clearing the Legislature.

"Without more guidance on what would or would not be allowed as a legitimate use of campaign funds, this bill could have unintended consequences and could lead to use of political donations for expenditures far beyond what any reasonable donor would expect," Newsom said [in his veto message](#). "We must ensure political donations are utilized in a manner consistent with their intended purpose."

The change to the definition of security expenses in the latest proposal was to prohibit using campaign funds to purchase firearms. Bonta said at a committee hearing in March that the governor was concerned about elected officials using the bill to "arm people in excess."

"We've addressed those concerns," Bonta said.

Newsom's office declined to comment on the pending legislation.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The bill awaits a floor vote in the Senate before it would head to Newsom's desk again. It needs a two-thirds majority to pass and would take effect immediately after being signed into law.

WHAT ARE SOME STORIES ON THE BILL?

[Read POLITICO news on AB 2041.](#)