



**CALIFORNIA STATE SENATOR**

**SUZETTE MARTINEZ  
VALLADARES**

REPRESENTING DISTRICT 23

## **Senate Bill 264 – Impersonating Peace Officers/Firefighters**

### **Summary**

Senate Bill 264 would create a penalty enhancement for impersonating a peace officer or firefighter during a state or local emergency by making it a wobler.

### **Background**

The recent wildfires in Los Angeles have highlighted a disturbing trend—individuals impersonating firefighters and other emergency responders in evacuation zones. These incidents are not only disruptive but pose significant risks to public safety and law enforcement efforts. In one particularly alarming instance, an individual who claimed to be a firefighter was found attempting to burglarize a home that had been evacuated due to the flames. This act of criminal impersonation is one of many that have been reported, and it raises a number of important questions about the current legal framework and the motives behind such actions.

As of January 15, 2025, up to 60 individuals have been arrested for burglarizing homes in the Los Angeles evacuation zones, capitalizing on the chaos caused by the wildfires. In addition to burglary, at least six individuals have been apprehended for attempting to start new fires in the area, complicating the already dangerous firefighting efforts. The tactics used by these impersonators are often opportunistic—taking advantage of the vulnerability of evacuated neighborhoods and the

overwhelming pressure faced by first responders.

While the motives behind these impersonations vary, many suspects appear to be using the guise of authority to gain access to homes, potentially with the intent to loot. Others may be more malicious, seeking to exacerbate the crisis by starting additional fires, either to cause harm or to further complicate emergency response efforts.

Currently, the legal consequences for impersonating a first responder in California are somewhat limited. The offense is classified as a misdemeanor under state law, which means that those arrested for impersonating firefighters or peace officers could face relatively light penalties. However, this legal framework does not yet account for the unique circumstances that arise during a state or local emergency. There are no specific provisions that allow for enhanced penalties or harsher consequences for such offenses during catastrophic events like wildfires.

### **Which code section is affected?**

This bill would amend Sections 538d and 538e of the Penal Code.

### **Proposal**

This bill would make impersonating a peace officer or a member of a fire department or the Office of the State Fire Marshal during a state of emergency or local emergency

punishable as either a misdemeanor or a felony. Specifically, the bill gives district attorneys the discretion to charge these crimes as a felony with a maximum fine of \$10,000, or imprisonment in a county jail, or both.

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**Supporters:**

*Pending*