

To: Iowa Legislative Services Agency
From: Iowa Department of Public Safety
Re: Swatting Penalties Pre-File Bill Request

November 27, 2023

Background (e.g. current law or status):

Iowa has seen a significant uptick in the number of calls being made to emergency communication centers and law enforcement agencies falsely reporting threat to life emergencies, including active school shootings and bomb threats. These calls, commonly referred to as “swatting calls,” are intended to trigger an immediate and widespread law enforcement deployment or emergency service response to a specific location. In 2021, the Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center (DOI/FC) documented four (4) swatting incidents in Iowa. During the 2022-2023 school year alone, the DOI/FC recorded 39 incidents in Iowa. Swatting has become an epidemic on the national level as well, with the FBI recently establishing a database to track and prevent these incidents.

Current law provides that a person who reports false information to a public safety entity knowing the information is false commits a serious misdemeanor.

Solution:

Increase the penalty from a serious misdemeanor to a class D felony. If the swatting incident results in serious injury or death, a person commits a class C felony. These penalties would be consistent with other states who have recently increased the penalty for swatting, including New York, Wisconsin and Ohio.

Goal:

To deter bad actors from making hoax or false reports of serious emergency situations that require a large police response. Keeping the public and responding agencies safe is of utmost importance, and these situations put them at risk and are disruptive to the involved community.

Also to prevent tying up and expending emergency services and resources for extended periods of time responding to a hoax call.