

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



**FROM:** Supervisor Chuck Washington

**SUBMITTAL DATE:** July 16, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Senate Bill 167 (Gaines, Gatto), "Drones Over Wildfires."

**RECOMMENDED MOTION:** That the Board of Supervisors Support S.B. 167 and direct the Executive Office to notify the appropriate Legislators of the Board's action.

**BACKGROUND:**

The use of drones is expanding nationwide, but our laws have fallen behind and need to catch up with the technology. Disruption of firefighting activities by drones can have grave consequences and must be severely dealt with in California's code. Impeding one tanker drop could be the difference between life and death of an individual or the loss of an entire neighborhood in flames. SB 167 is an urgently needed and important piece of legislation that will protect forests, property and the lives of citizens and firefighters. The bill is a reaction to a string of recent disturbing reports indicating that private drones operating over wildfires have grounded all aircraft dedicated to containing those blazes. In some cases, critical, flame retardant loads and precious water resources were forced to be wasted.

SB 167 increases the penalties for drone interference with firefighting activities. This bill will make it a misdemeanor to operate a drone in violation of the law. Possible imprisonment for cases of intentional or reckless operation of a drone in violation, there is a penalty of imprisonment in a county jail for not more than six months, or a fine of \$5,000, or both the fine or imprisonment.

Under federal law, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) could levy fines for violating a "temporary flight restriction," but there would be no criminal penalty. Currently, there is no federal law providing criminal penalties for this problem; the closest thing is violations of "national defense airspace," but criminal penalties would not apply. There is no state penalty for violating these federal restrictions.

**Impact on Residents and Businesses**

Passage of S.B. 167 would enhance public safety by limiting the airspace on federal lands during wildland fire events.

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Chuck Washington, Supervisor  
Third District

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