



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 2, 2011

California Lawmakers Propose Controversial Bills

Lawmakers in California are advancing a number of controversial bills through the Senate and Assembly, including legislation that would provide financial aid to undocumented university students. Another prevents “Bell-style” financial scandals, pension “spiking,” and disruptive picketing at military funerals. Other measures include provisions that permit local police to closely monitor social networking sites, and would end the necessitated fingerprinting of food stamp recipients. In total, 200 bills were passed in the Senate or Assembly and moved to the other house for a vote.



The bill regarding financial aid for undocumented students was proposed by Assemblyman Gil Cedillo (D-Los Angeles), and would allow those students to become eligible for Cal-Grants, aid, and fee waivers at publicly-funded colleges. The bill was previously vetoed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger but has been reintroduced by Cedillo, who asserts that the measure is necessary to help “children brought here through no choice of their own, who embrace our values and learn the language.”

The measure was adamantly opposed by Republicans who contended it would encourage illegal immigration.

Meanwhile, the California Senate approved legislation that forces registered sex offenders to provide any online names, email addresses, and social networking accounts they maintain to local law enforcement. Advocates of the measure assert it will reduce Internet-related sex crimes.

Senator Sharon Runner, who wrote the legislation, said, “It does give sex offenders reason to think before engaging in predatory practices on the Internet.”

Meanwhile, legislation that eliminates the fingerprinting of food stamp recipients is being touted as a cost-saving measure. Advocates of the bill claim that fingerprinting is an unnecessary and costly process, as other protections are in place to ensure that no fraud is committed.

The *L.A. Times* writes:

Democrats cited a state audit that estimated the cost of fingerprinting for next year alone at \$17 million, which the lawmakers deemed excessive. Most Republicans voted no, reasoning that striking the fingerprinting requirement would be an invitation to fraud. But the measure, AB 6, passed the Assembly.

According to Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, the measure needlessly “keeps people from food.”

Fraud is the motive behind legislation that permits the state controller greater power to investigate the financial records of cities in California. Introduced by Senator Fran Pavley, the proposal is in response to the scandal in Bell, when city managers were convicted of felony misuse of taxpayer funds.



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As the state controller is currently limited to sending auditors into local agencies to inspect annual financial records, Pavley's legislation allows the controller greater access to financial records without sole reliance on annual financial reports.

Senators in cash-strapped California also approved a measure that prohibits pension spiking and so-called "double-dipping" by public employees who retire from one government job and begin work at another, thereby receiving payments from two state sources concurrently.

Introduced by state Senator Joe Simitian, the bill targets state and local employees, including those involved in the Bell scandal, who purposefully boost their pay in order to acquire greater pension benefits.

The *L.A. Times* explains of the proposal:

Under Simitian's proposal, SB 27, the California Public Employees' Retirement System and the State Teachers' Retirement System would be prevented from raising pension benefits based on end-of-career salary hikes. In addition, employees would be barred from returning to work for a government agency for 180 days after retiring from one.

The California Senate also passed a measure that is seemingly in violation of a recent Supreme Court ruling. Authored by Senator Ted Lieu, the bill makes it a violation to picket at funeral services in a way perceived to be disruptive unless protesters are 1,000 feet away and on public property.

The proposal follows last month's Supreme Court ruling regarding the Westboro Baptist Church protests outside of military funerals. According to the ruling, despite the incongruity of the message advocated by the church — that the deaths of U.S. soldiers are punishment for the nation's tolerance of homosexuality — the protesters maintain the right to free speech.

Lieu contends that his bill ensures "the sanctity and dignity of funerals."

California lawmakers have also proposed legislation pertaining to minors who have received life sentences without parole. The measure, proposed by Senator LeLand Yee, introduces the prospect of a case review after 15 years in prison.

Yee contends, "This bill is about giving kids a second chance."

Republican critics of the measure assert it violates the very notion of punishment, and declare that criminals should be serving their full sentences.

Other measures proposed in California provide clear indication of just how cash-strapped the state of California is. Bills include those that require online retailers to collect sales tax on purchases by California residents, provide counties the power to impose extra vehicle license fees in order to pay for local services, restrict public pensions to the federal cap of \$195,000, and report annually on rape-kit data to the Department of Justice since more than 10,000 rape kits remained unopened in 2008.

Whether the proposed measures will pass in both houses remains to be seen. The proposals, however, are a clear indication that California lawmakers are recognizing the dire financial straits in which the state finds itself.



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