

# The Star-Ledger

## **Calling 911 with a false claim because of race can now put you in prison for years in N.J.**

By Blake Nelson

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Calling 911 to harass somebody because of their race in New Jersey can now put you in prison for years.

Gov. Phil Murphy signed a bill (A1906) into law late Monday making it a crime to call 911 solely to intimidate someone because of their ethnicity, religion or gender, among other categories. Violators face up to five years in prison and fines up to \$15,000.

Calling police “as an intimidation tactic against people of color is an unacceptable, abhorrent form of discrimination,” Murphy said in a statement. He added that it “places victims in a potentially dangerous situation” while eroding trust between cops and communities.

The law took effect immediately.

Murphy’s signature came a little more than three months after a white woman was filmed in Central Park calling police on a Black bird watcher who asked her to put her dog on a leash. She originally claimed he was threatening her, but she later apologized for her “false assumptions” and was charged with filing a false police report.

New Jersey’s law also makes filing a false police report a form of “bias intimidation,” which generally carries the threat of a year-and-a-half behind bars and up to a \$10,000 fine.

State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said in a statement a false call “interferes with 911 emergency operators trying to save lives.” Lawmakers lauded the proposal, saying it was another response to recent protests against police brutality and systemic racism.

In a fiscal note, legislative researchers said fines from violators could lessen the costs of new prosecutions, but concluded exact numbers were impossible to estimate.

Earlier in the summer, New York lawmakers also approved a bill making it easier under civil rights law to sue someone who calls the police “without reason” because of somebody’s race.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*