



Ohio Legislative Service Commission

Bill Analysis

Aida S. Montano

Am. S.B. 361*

130th General Assembly
(As Reported by H. Judiciary)

Sens. Seitz, Eklund, Obhof, LaRose, Bacon, Patton, Brown, Burke, Coley, Faber, Hite, Jordan, Kearney, Lehner, Sawyer, Schiavoni, Skindell, Turner, Uecker

BILL SUMMARY

- Requires every act that creates a new criminal offense to specify the degree of mental culpability required for the commission of the offense and provides that a criminal offense for which no degree of mental culpability is specified that is enacted in an act that does not comply with the requirement is void.
- Specifies that the above requirement does not apply to the amendment of an offense that existed on the bill's effective date but applies to a new offense added to a statute that existed on that date.
- Provides that, if one division of a section plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict liability for an offense, that does not by itself plainly indicate a purpose to impose strict criminal liability for an offense defined in other divisions of the section that do not specify a degree of culpability.
- Modifies current law by providing that when language defining an element of an offense that is related to knowledge or intent or to which mens rea could fairly be applied neither specifies culpability nor plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict liability, the element of the offense is established only if a person acts recklessly, and provides exceptions to this rule.
- Expands current law's mental state of "knowingly" by providing that when knowledge of a particular fact is an element of an offense, knowledge is established if a person subjectively believes that there is a high probability of its existence and fails to ask or tries to avoid learning the fact.

* This analysis was prepared before the report of the House Judiciary Committee appeared in the House Journal. Note that the list of co-sponsors and the legislative history may be incomplete.

- Modifies current law's mental state of "recklessly" by providing that, with heedless indifference to the consequences, a person disregards a substantial and unjustifiable risk that the person's conduct is likely to cause a certain result instead of a known risk, as under current law.

CONTENT AND OPERATION

Mental culpability for new offenses

The bill requires that every act enacted on or after the bill's effective date that creates a new criminal offense specify the degree of mental culpability required for commission of the offense. A criminal offense for which no degree of mental culpability is specified that is enacted in an act in violation of this provision is void. The above requirement does not apply to the amendment of an offense that existed on the bill's effective date, but it does apply to a new offense added to a statute that existed on that effective date.¹

Criminal liability; culpability

The bill modifies one of current law's requirements for a person to be guilty of an offense by providing that the person must have the requisite degree of culpability for each element as to which a culpable mental state is specified by the language (instead of "section") defining the offense.² Culpability is not required for a person to be guilty of the offense when the language (instead of "section") defining an offense does not specify a degree of culpability and plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict criminal liability for the conduct described in the section. The fact that one division of a section plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict liability for an offense defined in that division does not by itself plainly indicate a purpose to impose strict criminal liability for an offense defined in other divisions of the section that do not specify a degree of culpability.³

The bill modifies current law by providing that when language defining an element of an offense that is related to knowledge or intent or to which mens rea could fairly be applied neither specifies culpability nor plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict liability, the element of the offense is established only if a person acts recklessly. Under current law, if the section neither specifies culpability nor plainly indicates a purpose to impose strict liability, recklessness is sufficient culpability to commit the offense. Under the bill, this provision does not apply to offenses under the Motor

¹ R.C. 2901.20.

² R.C. 2901.21(A).

³ R.C. 2901.21(B).



Vehicle, Aeronautics, and Watercraft Law and does not relieve the prosecution of the burden of proving the culpable mental state required by any definition incorporated into the offense.⁴

Degrees of mental culpability

The bill expands current law which specifies when a person acts knowingly. Under the bill, when knowledge of the existence of a particular fact is an element of an offense, knowledge is established if a person subjectively believes that there is a high probability of its existence and fails to ask or tries to avoid learning the fact. Under current law, a person acts knowingly, regardless of purpose, when the person is aware that the person's conduct will probably cause a certain result or will probably be of a certain nature. A person has knowledge of circumstances when the person is aware that such circumstances probably exist.

The bill modifies current law by providing that a person acts recklessly when, with heedless indifference to the consequences, the person disregards a substantial and unjustifiable risk that the person's conduct is likely to cause a certain result or is likely to be of a certain nature. A person is reckless with respect to circumstances when, with heedless indifference to the consequences the person disregards a substantial and unjustifiable risk that such circumstances are likely to exist. Current law specifies that a person acts recklessly or is reckless with respect to circumstances when the person "perversely disregards a known risk."⁵

HISTORY

ACTION	DATE
Introduced	09-08-14
Reported, S. Criminal Justice	12-04-14
Passed Senate (32-0)	12-04-14
Reported, H. Judiciary	---

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⁴ R.C. 2901.21(C).

⁵ R.C. 2901.22(B).

