

Utah Legislative Committee Passes Bill With Harsh Penalties For Rioters

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A Utah legislative committee approved a bill that creates harsher penalties for people charged with rioting.

[A bill that increases penalties](#) and eliminates bail for rioting passed a Utah legislative committee Wednesday.

The proposal from Sen. David Hinkins, R-Ferron, is in response to [last year's protests](#) against police brutality and racial injustice.

During the presentation to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Hinkins brought members of the armed neighborhood watch group [United Citizens Alarm](#) to present the bill with him.

Casey Robertson said he formed the organization after a motorist was [shot by protesters](#) in Provo last year.

"The citizens of Utah overwhelmingly support harsh penalties for riotous, violent and unlawful behavior," Robertson said. "If this bill passes, violent criminals will think twice before destroying our towns and threatening and harassing Utah citizens."

Sophia Anderson also helped present the bill. She said she was worried the committee was biased because Sen. Derek Kitchen, D-Salt Lake City, donated money to protesters who painted the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office red.

"I don't know how we can continue as the great city and state that we are when we are being infiltrated by people that do not uphold the Constitution and do not want to protect others," she said.

Kitchen didn't address her comment, but Sen. Daniel Thatcher, R-West Valley, said the Democrat's \$10 donation wasn't to blame for the damage done to the building.

"Unless you can read his mind that it was his intent to support criminal actions, I don't believe that it is ethical or fair to disparage his character or integrity in any way," Thatcher said.

The legislation would also give immunity to someone driving a car who hits or kills a protester if the driver fears for their life.

That same language was [removed from a different bill](#) after opposition from the public.

Marina Lowe, policy council for the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah, likened that to what happened during the 2017 Unite the Right rally, when a neo-Nazi [rammed protesters](#) with his car, injuring 35 people and killing Heather Heyer.

"I mean, this is the Charlottesville situation," Lowe said. "I think that's very problematic."

Sen. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, said he had some issues with the bill but would still vote for it. He said most people who protested over the summer were peaceful.

"It's my belief that 98, maybe even 99% of the people that participated in the protests in Salt Lake were not rioters, had no intent to riot and many of them kind of got smeared by the actions of relatively few," Weiler said.

Other penalties were removed from the bill before it passed along party lines.