

Calif. targets cell-phone crimes from prisons (*Government Computer News*)

By [Kevin McCaney](#)

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The problem of prison inmates using smuggled cell phones is bad enough, California officials point out, that even Charles Manson [can get his hands on one](#) in solitary confinement. But their real concern is the number of other prisoners using cell phones to carry out criminal operations.

The state wants to crack down under a bill that would increase the punishment for smuggling phones into prisons and allow prisons to set up a wireless monitoring system that could detect and block unauthorized transmissions.

State Sen. Alex Padilla, who introduced the bill, [SB 26](#), said in [a release](#) that cell phones present a growing problem in prisons. They're fairly easy to smuggle in, and are being used to initiate crimes such as "ordering murders, organizing escapes, facilitating drug deals, controlling street gangs and terrorizing rape victims," Padilla said.

The number of cell phones confiscated in California prisons has risen from 261 in 2006 to 10,761 in 2010. People who smuggle them in sell them to inmates for more than \$1,000 each, Padilla said. He also mentioned that [Manson](#), notorious for inspiring a 1969 killing spree, has twice been caught with a cell phone.

Under the bill, smuggling a cell phone into a prison could draw up to six months in jail and a \$5,000 fine. Inmates on the receiving end would permanently lose any good time credits.

The bill also would authorize the use of what Padilla called "managed access technology" to monitor wireless communications and block illegal calls, texts and e-mail messages.

The California Technology Agency plans to award a contract for is an Inmate/Ward Telephone System and Managed Access System, Government Technology [reports](#).

Illegal use of cell phones in prisons isn't limited to California — 46 other states have tried to address the issue, Padilla said.

Several states, including Maryland and South Carolina, have asked the Federal Communications Commission for permission to test or deploy cell phone jamming technology around their prisons.

The idea of jamming cellular transmissions has met with some resistance, however, because although it might keep inmates from conducting criminal business, it could also interfere with emergency communications. Federal law also prohibits anyone other than federal agencies from jamming radio signals.

Mississippi has taken the tack of using the technology for access control, with a system that [registers all cell phones](#) brought into a prison and blocks transmission from any phone that isn't registered.

California's SB 26 has been passed by the state Senate and currently is [before the state assembly](#). If passed and signed by Gov. Jerry Brown, it would take effect immediately.

About the Author

Kevin McCaney is the managing editor of Government Computer News.

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