

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Criminal Justice

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BILL: SB 1256

INTRODUCER: Senator Brandes

SUBJECT: Alternative Sanctioning

DATE: January 29, 2016

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Sumner	Cannon	CJ	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			ACJ	
3.			AP	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1256 creates an alternative sanctioning program (“program”) for technical violations of probation. The bill defines “technical violation” as any alleged violation of supervision that is not a new felony offense, misdemeanor offense, or criminal traffic offense. The bill allows the chief judge of each judicial circuit, in consultation with the state attorney, public defender, and Department of Corrections, to establish an alternative sanctioning program and determine which technical violations will be eligible for alternative sanctioning.

An eligible probationer who commits a technical violation may choose to participate in the program and admit to the violation, comply with a probation officer’s recommended sanctions, and waive his or her right to a hearing on the violation. A probation officer’s recommended alternative sanction must be reviewed by the court, which may approve the sanction or remove the probationer from the program.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Probation**

Any person who is found guilty by a jury or the court sitting without a jury or who enters a plea of guilty or nolo contendere may be placed on probation regardless of whether adjudication is withheld.<sup>1</sup> The court determines the terms and conditions of probation. The standard conditions of probation that do not require oral pronouncement, include:

- Report to the probation and parole supervisors as directed;
- Permit such supervisors to visit him or her at his or her home or elsewhere;
- Work faithfully at suitable employment insofar as may be possible;
- Remain within a specified place;

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<sup>1</sup> Section 948.01(1) F.S.

- Live without violating any law;
- Make reparation or restitution to the aggrieved party;
- Repayment of debt to a county or municipal detention facility for medical care, treatment received;
- Payment of any fees due;
- Not associate with persons engaged in criminal activities; and
- Submit to random testing.<sup>2</sup>

When a defendant is placed on probation the Department of Corrections (“department”) provides immediate officer supervision. Private entities may not provide probationary or supervision services to felony or misdemeanor offenders sentenced or placed on probation or other supervision by the circuit court.<sup>3</sup>

Section 948.06, F.S., provides procedures regarding a violation of the terms and conditions required of a person on probation. Upon violation, the probationer is arrested and brought before the sentencing court. At the first hearing on the violation, the probationer is advised of the charge. If the probationer admits the charge, the court may immediately revoke, modify, or continue the probation or place the probationer into a community control program.

If the probationer denies having violated the terms of the probation, the court may commit him or her to jail or release him or her with or without bail to await further hearing, or it may dismiss the charge of probation violation. Unless dismissed, the court must conduct a hearing and determine whether the probationer has violated the terms of his or her probation. If the court finds that the probationer has violated, the court may immediately revoke, modify, or continue the probation or place the probationer into a community control program.

If probation is revoked, the court must adjudicate the probationer guilty of the offense charged and proven or admitted, unless he or she has previously been adjudicated guilty. The court may then impose any sentence that it might have originally imposed for the offense for which the probationer was placed on probation or into community control.

### **Technical Violations**

Section 948.06(1)(g), F.S., provides that the chief judge of each judicial circuit may direct the department to use a notification letter of a technical violation in lieu of a violation report when the alleged violation is not a new felony or misdemeanor.

During Fiscal Year 2014-15, approximately 94,000 violation reports were submitted to the court due to probation violations. Of this number, 61,777 (or 66%) were technical violations. Because of overcrowded court dockets, it often takes weeks and multiple hearings for a probationer to be sentenced as the result of a violation of probation. If the probationer is charged with a technical violation, these hearings often result in the court reinstating or modifying the probation with additional sanctions imposed. If the probationer is held in jail pending a violation hearing, he or

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<sup>2</sup> Section 948.03(1), F.S.

<sup>3</sup> Section 948.01(1)(a), F.S.

she may lose employment and be unable to pay victim restitution, attend treatment, or comply with supervision requirements.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to improve the violation of probation process, the department's Office of Community Corrections developed the Alternative Sanctions Program to reduce recidivism for supervised probationers by utilizing collaborative efforts between courts, probation, and law enforcement. The program, created through administrative order in each circuit, allows a technical violation to be addressed immediately with the probationer through an administrative process. Circuit court judges in 12 counties within six judicial circuits have agreed to implement the Alternative Sanctions Program via administrative order, including Alachua, Brevard, Desoto, Flagler, Manatee, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Putnam, Sarasota, Seminole, St. Johns, and Volusia.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill codifies current practice by creating an alternative sanctioning program ("program") for technical violations of probation. The bill defines technical violations as any alleged violation of supervision that is not a new felony offense, misdemeanor offense, or criminal traffic offense. The bill allows the chief judge of each judicial circuit, in consultation with the state attorney, public defender, and the department, to establish an alternative sanctioning program and determine which technical violations will be eligible for alternative sanctioning.

If an eligible offender on probation is alleged to have committed a technical violation, the offender may either waive participation in the program or elect to participate. By participating in the program, the offender admits to the violation, agrees to the probation officer's recommended sanction, and waives the right to:

- Be represented by legal counsel;
- Require the state to prove his or her guilt before a neutral and detached hearing body;
- Subpoena witnesses and present to a judge evidence in his or her defense;
- Confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses; and
- Receive a written statement from a factfinder as to the evidence relied on and the reasons for the sanction imposed.

Before imposing the sanction, the probation officer must submit the recommended sanction and documentation of the offender's admission of violation and agreement with the sanction to the court. The court has the discretion to impose the recommended sanction or to direct the department to submit a violation report, affidavit, and warrant like a normal case not in the program. Any participation by the offender in the program is solely voluntary and the offender may elect to discontinue participation in the program as long as it is before the issuance of the court order imposing the recommended sanction. When an offender quits the program, the probation officer may submit a violation report, affidavit, and warrant to the court concerning the violation. Any prior admission by the offender may not be used as evidence in subsequent proceedings.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Corrections Legislative Bill Analysis 2016 SB 1256. (On file with the Florida Senate Criminal Justice Committee.)

<sup>5</sup> Id.

The chief judge, in order to establish the program, must issue an administrative order specifying eligibility, which technical violations will be eligible for program, which sanctions may be recommended by a probation officer, and the process for reporting violations of the program.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

According to the department, alternative sanctioning programs may decrease expenditures by reducing law enforcement arrests, jail incarceration of offenders pending technical violation hearings, probation officer time spent at these violation hearings, and court personnel involved in the violation hearing process.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 948.06 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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