

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 37  
Judiciary

(Delegate Sydnor, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

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**Criminal Procedure - Cell Site Simulator Technology**

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This bill authorizes a court to issue an order authorizing or directing a law enforcement officer to use a specified “cell site simulator.” The bill (1) establishes requirements for a court order and the use of any information obtained relating to the use of a cell site simulator and (2) applies current law provisions relating to an application for an order to obtain location information by law enforcement and the duration of such an order to the use of cell site simulator technology by law enforcement. By February 1 each year, each law enforcement agency must post on its website and report to the Governor and the General Assembly the number of times a cell site simulator was used by the agency during the previous calendar year, as specified. **The bill’s reporting requirement terminates September 30, 2024.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Minimal increase in general fund expenditures. No effect on revenues.

**Local Effect:** Minimal increase in local expenditures. No effect on revenues.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** “Cell site simulator” means a device that mimics a cell tower and captures identifying information of electronic devices in the range of the device.

### *Issuance of Order*

A court may issue an order by application on a determination that there is probable cause to believe that (1) a misdemeanor or felony has been, is being, or will be committed by the user/owner of the electronic device or the individual about whom electronic location information is being sought and (2) the information sought by the cell site simulator is evidence of, or will lead to evidence of, the misdemeanor or felony being investigated or will lead to the apprehension of an individual for whom an arrest warrant has previously been issued.

### *Requirements of Order*

An order authorizing use of a cell site simulator must:

- name or describe with reasonable particularity (1) the type of electronic device associated with the use of the cell site simulator; (2) the user of the electronic device, if known, or the identifying number of the electronic device; (3) the owner of the electronic device, if known, and whether the owner is a person or an entity other than the user; (4) the grounds for using the cell site simulator; and (5) the name of the applicant on whose application the order was issued;
- authorize the executing law enforcement officer to use a cell site simulator without giving notice to the owner or user of the electronic device or to the individual about whom information is being sought for the duration of the order;
- specify the period of time for which use of a cell site simulator is authorized;
- require that any third-party or nontarget data be retained for not more than 10 days and be permanently destroyed after the 10-day period;
- require that no content data be obtained;
- restrict the investigative use of any third-party or nontarget data without further court order; and
- require that a copy of the application and order be provided in discovery.

### *Admissibility of Evidence*

Evidence obtained in violation of the bill's provisions is subject to the exclusionary rule, as judicially determined. Under no circumstances is information collected on a nontarget device admissible in a criminal, civil, administrative, or other proceeding.

**Current Law:** Chapter 191 of 2014 authorizes a court to issue an order authorizing or directing a law enforcement officer to obtain "location information" from an "electronic device." "Location information" means real-time or present information concerning the

geographic location of an electronic device that is generated by or derived from the operation of that device.

### *Issuance of Order*

A court may issue an order on a determination from an application that there is probable cause to believe that (1) a misdemeanor or felony has been, is being, or will be committed by the user/owner of the electronic device or the individual about whom electronic location information is being sought and (2) the location information being sought is evidence of, or will lead to evidence of, the misdemeanor or felony being investigated or will lead to the apprehension of an individual for whom an arrest warrant has previously been issued.

### *Application for Order*

An application for an order must be in writing, signed and sworn to by the applicant, and accompanied by an affidavit that sets forth the basis for the probable cause and contains facts within the personal knowledge of the affiant. The order must (1) contain specified information; (2) authorize the executing law enforcement officer to obtain the location information without giving notice to the user/owner of the electronic device or to the individual about whom the location information is being sought for the duration of the order; (3) specify the period of time for which the disclosure of information is authorized; and (4) if applicable, order the service provider to disclose to the executing law enforcement officer the location information associated with the electronic device for the period of time for which disclosure is authorized and refrain from notifying the user/owner of the electronic device or any other person of the disclosure of location information for as long as the notice is authorized to be delayed.

### *Duration of Order*

In general, the period of time during which location information may be obtained under a location information order may not exceed 30 days. Within 10 calendar days after an order is issued, law enforcement must begin to obtain location information or, if applicable, deliver the order to the service provider. If neither of these two events occurs within 10 calendar days after the issuance of the order, the order is void.

A location information order may be extended beyond 30 calendar days on a finding of continuing probable cause. An extension may not exceed an additional 30 calendar days unless the court finds continuing probable cause and determines that good cause exists for a longer extension.

### *Notice of Order to Owner or User of Electronic Device*

Notice of the location information order must be delivered to the user and, if known and if the owner is a person or an entity other than the user, the subscriber of the applicable electronic device. The notice must state the general nature of the law enforcement inquiry and inform the user/owner (1) if applicable, that location information maintained by the service provider was supplied to a law enforcement officer; (2) if applicable, the identifying number associated with the electronic device; (3) the dates for which the location information was supplied; (4) whether notification was delayed; and (5) which court authorized the order.

The notice must be delivered within 10 calendar days after the expiration of the order. However, a court, on a finding of good cause, may order that the application, affidavit, and order be sealed, and that the required notification be delayed for a period of 30 calendar days. A finding of good cause may be established by evidence that (1) the criminal investigation to which the affidavit is related is of a continuing nature and likely to yield further information that could be of use in prosecuting alleged criminal activities and (2) failure to maintain confidentiality of the investigation would jeopardize the use of information already obtained in the investigation, impair the continuation of the investigation, or jeopardize the safety of an information source. A court may order that notification be delayed beyond 30 calendar days if a law enforcement officer provides continued evidence of good cause and the court makes a finding of good cause based on evidence that notice should be further delayed to preserve the continuation of the investigation.

### *Exceptions to Order Requirement*

A law enforcement officer may obtain location information without an order for up to 48 hours in exigent circumstances or with the express consent of the user/owner of the electronic device.

### *Civil Liability*

A person may not be held civilly liable for complying with these provisions by providing location information.

**Background:** According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 75 law enforcement agencies in 27 states and the District of Columbia use cell site simulator technology to track the locations of cell phones. In Maryland, the ACLU indicates that Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD); the Annapolis City Police Department; and the Department of State Police (DSP) have the technology. These devices,

often referred to by their trade names of Stingray, Hailstorm, or IMSI catchers, mimic cell phone towers and trick cell phones within range to connect with them, allowing law enforcement to determine which cell phones are in the area and where they are located.

Determining which law enforcement agencies are deploying cell site simulator technology has been hindered by nondisclosure agreements with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Harris Corporation, the manufacturer of the device, entered into as a condition of sale of the devices. As revealed by court documents, BPD's nondisclosure agreement precluded disclosure of any information related to the cell site simulator technology, even in court documents or during judicial hearings.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase minimally for the Judiciary to accommodate the bill's requirements. The Judiciary advises that the bill is likely to result in an increase in applications for court orders and requests for extensions submitted by law enforcement personnel to judges and additional judicial time necessary for the review and issuance of cell site simulator technology related orders. However, the operational and fiscal impact of this effect is difficult to project because of uncertainty with respect to the number of additional filings the courts will receive. An order issued under the bill has a shorter duration than other available options and may require law enforcement to file for extensions more frequently.

Based on information provided by DSP and the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) Police, it is assumed that all State law enforcement agencies can implement the bill with existing budgeted resources. DSP advises that the bill codifies existing practice. MDTA advises that the bill may result in MDTA police having to complete additional paperwork; however, it can implement the bill with existing resources.

The University System of Maryland advises that Towson University Police do not possess or use cell site simulator technology; however, if the university obtains such technology in the future, the bill may result in a minimal increase in overtime and associated costs.

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) and the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association advise that the bill's requirements create a substantial burden and result in increased workloads. However, the Department of Legislative Services disagrees and advises that the bill's requirements can be handled with existing resources, as any litigation related to the use of cell site simulator technology is likely to be a part of the overall case accepted for representation offered by OPD and prosecuted by assistant State's Attorneys for the State.

**Local Expenditures:** Expenditures increase minimally for the circuit courts to comply with the bill's requirements. The extent of the fiscal impact depends on the volume of requests for applicable orders filed in the jurisdiction. Local law enforcement agencies can implement the bill with existing resources.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** HB 314 of 2018, a similar bill, passed the House with amendments and passed on third reading with amendments in the Senate, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, SB 431, passed on second reading with amendments in the Senate, but no further action was taken. HB 917 of 2017, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report by the House Judiciary Committee. Its cross file, SB 878, was withdrawn after being heard by the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. HB 904 of 2016, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report from the House Judiciary Committee.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** City of Takoma Park; Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Maryland State's Attorneys' Association; University System of Maryland; Department of Natural Resources; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; American Civil Liberties Union; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 18, 2019  
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Analysis by: Shirleen M. E. Pilgrim

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510