



## Legal Protections for Public Health Officials: Threats and Interfering with Government Operations

### Oklahoma Fact Sheet

## 50-State Survey Summary

Nationwide, state and local public health officials working to protect the public from COVID-19 are on the receiving end of threatening and harassing conduct for simply fulfilling their duty to protect the public health. In response, the Network conducted research to examine whether the states and Washington, D.C. have criminal statutes punishing individuals who impede public health officials' duties with such behavior. Our research is presented in this [chart](#). Many states have adopted statutes to protect public officials generally; included here are those with broad enough language to include public health officials. States with laws that cover other public officials, but not public health officials, were not included in this chart. While 35 states and Washington, D.C., have such a statute, the remaining 15 states either do not have a statute protecting government officials in these circumstances or do not have one protecting public health officials. Of the 35 states and Washington, D.C., all but 2, Louisiana and Oklahoma, include protections for state **and** local officials.

Below is more information on Oklahoma's relevant law.

## Disturbance, Interference, or Disruption of State Business

### Oklahoma Statutes Annotated, Title 21, § 280, Disturbance, Interference, or Disruption of State Business

A. It is unlawful for any person, alone or in concert with others and without authorization, to willfully disturb, interfere or disrupt state business, agency operations or any employee, agent, official or representative of the state.

B. It is unlawful for any person who is without authority or who is causing any disturbance, interference or disruption to willfully refuse to disperse or leave any property, building or structure owned, leased or occupied by state officials, employees, agents or representatives or used in any manner to conduct state business or operations after proper notice by a peace officer, sergeant-at-arms, or other security personnel.

C. Any violation of the provisions of this section shall be a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for a term of not more than one (1) year, by a fine not exceeding One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00), or by both such fine and imprisonment.



D. For purposes of this section, “disturb, interfere or disrupt” means any conduct that is violent, threatening, abusive, obscene, or that jeopardizes the safety of self or others.

## Penalties

### Oklahoma Statutes Annotated, Title 21, § 280

Up to one year imprisonment and/or up to a \$1,000 fine

## Summary

A person may be guilty of a misdemeanor when he/she uses violent, threatening, abusive, or obscene behavior that jeopardizes the safety of self or others and ultimately disturbs, interferes, or disrupts **state** business. If convicted, a person faces up to one year imprisonment and/or up to a \$1,000 fine.

## Template Response to Violators

**Below is a sample template for notifying perpetrators regarding their conduct relative to the code.**

**Oklahoma Statutes Annotated, Title 21 § 280** prohibits the interference, disturbance, or disruption with state business [insert here a description of the conduct with a date—for example: On August 28, 2020, you sent an email threatening harm to the Oklahoma Governor for implementing a mask mandate.] *This may constitute a violation of **Title 21 § 280** If convicted, you face up to one year imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$1,000.*

- If the conduct is extreme, add: *We have notified the [insert proper law enforcement agency] of this conduct.*
- If the conduct does not rise to the level of reporting, add: *Should you continue with this conduct, we may report the matter to [insert law enforcement agency].*