

New York passes new laws to crack down on domestic violence, stalking, public lewdness

by Steven Getman
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New York state lawmakers a series of bills Wednesday (July 23) that strengthen existing laws and add new measures to protect residents from electronic harassment, stalking, and public lewdness.

Under the new laws, second-degree aggravated harassment will make it a crime to use harassing communications that "threaten to cause physical harm to a victim or the victim's property where a defendant knows or should know that the communication will cause the victim to fear such harm."

The harassment legislation is in response to a recent court decision, striking down a previous version of the law on First Amendment grounds.

The anti-stalking measure prohibits the tracking of a person with an electronic device where "likely to cause reasonable fear of material harm to the physical health, safety or property" of another person or their families.

Finally, the state enacted a new statute, creating the crime of Public Lewdness in the First Degree, a class A misdemeanor. It applies to individuals aged 19 or older who intentionally expose themselves to children under the age of 16. It is punishable by up to one year in county jail.

Previously, Public Lewdness was only a class B misdemeanor, and provided no additional penalties when the act was committed against a child.

It is hoped that these new laws, focusing on threats and endangerment of others, will strengthen protections for vulnerable members of the population, while ensuring important rights to free and open expression.

For more on these new laws, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/oocxgwu>

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