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High-tech crime crackdown gets support

Legislation to enhance law enforcement programs targeting high-tech crime is awaiting the signature of the governor, according to the bill's author, Assemblyman Joseph Simitian, D-Palo Alto.

The measure authorizes grants to local law enforcement programs to train prosecutors, investigators and officers to combat high tech crime. The bill also recognizes the need of law enforcement programs to focus on high tech financial crimes, often the goal of identity theft criminals, by including financial experts on the state's High Tech Crime Advisory Committee, Mr. Simitian says.

"High tech crimes are a relatively new category of crimes," Mr. Simitian says. "Well-trained personnel are critical to law enforcement's efforts to keep up with state-of-

the-art technology and the criminals and hackers who use that technology. This kind of training is a common-sense use of resources that ensures law enforcement can stop cybercriminals."

Mr. Simitian's bill authorizes the administrator of the High Technology Theft Apprehension and Prosecution Program (HTTAPP) to allocate a portion of the program's funding to public agencies and private non-profit organizations to establish statewide programs of education, training, and research for prosecutors, investigators, and law enforcement officers involved in deterring, investigating, and prosecuting high tech crimes.

"This is exactly the kind of tool we need in Silicon Valley to make sure our companies and local law enforcement work together even more effectively," says Carl

Guardino, chief executive officer of the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group.

The HTTAPP was established in 1997 to create law enforcement units to protect government, businesses, and citizens from high tech criminals. Recognizing that high tech crime required specialized equipment, investigative methods, forensics, and prosecution, the program provides funding for cooperative regional programs that bring together district attorneys, police, sheriffs, the FBI, and private business.

The specialized units have been successful in a variety of high tech crimes that range from capturing pedophiles that attempted to lure children through the Internet to breaking up half-billion dollar criminal organizations that sold stolen technology in overseas markets.

There are currently five regional high tech law enforcement programs in California, one of which serves Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

THE INDEPENDENT

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New unit to fight high-tech crimes

Governor approves money for police training and resources

By Chris Rooney
Independent Newspapers

Criminals keep getting smarter, but the long arm of the law will soon be armed with the right weapons to battle high-tech crime.

A new crime unit formed in San Mateo County to deal with such crime, comes just after the Legislature passed a law that will enhance programs targeting identification theft and other computer crimes.

Assembly Bill 821, authored by Assemblymember Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, authorizes grants to local law enforcement programs to train prosecutors, investigators and officers to combat high-tech crime.

It also recognizes the need of law enforcement programs to focus on high-tech financial crimes, often the goal of identity theft criminals, by including financial experts on the state's High-Tech Crime Advisory Committee.

"High-Tech crimes are a relatively new category of crimes," said Simitian. "Well-trained personnel are critical to law enforcement's efforts to keep up with state-of-the-art technology and the criminals and hackers who use that technology. This law allows

law enforcement to provide the kind of training necessary to stop cybercriminals."

The new law authorizes the administrator of the High Technology Theft Apprehension and Prosecution Program to allocate a portion of the program's funding to public agencies and private non-profit organizations to establish statewide programs of education, training and research for prosecutors, investigators and law enforcement officers involved in deterring, investigating and prosecuting high-tech crimes.

"There are a lot more cases of identification theft and phony e-mails," said San Mateo County Sheriff Don Horsley. "There are ways of tracking down the people responsible and we've gotten pretty good at tracking them down."

The state's high-tech crime program was established in 1997 to create law enforcement units to protect government, businesses and citizens from high-tech criminals. The program provides funding for cooperative regional programs that bring together district attorneys, police, sheriffs, the FBI and private business.

Simitian said he hopes the new law will help to "expand upon the successes of the original program, with particular emphasis on crimes of concern to Silicon Valley and the Peninsula."

There are currently five regional high-tech law enforcement programs in California, one of which serves Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Horsley explained that his department is working with police departments in Daly City and Millbrae to provide enough resources to make the unit successful. Other municipalities are expected to join the united front against cybercrime.

Currently, there are three full-time investigators and several part-time representatives from the various police departments. Key to the program is the county District Attorney's Office, which has already established a team for the forensic analysis of computers and similar investigative tools. Cyberstalking and the illegal distribution of pornography are among the crimes being addressed, but Simitian said that having the business sector involved in the movement is a new and integral step.

"It made sense to bring the folks from the financial world into the mix," Simitian said. "They've realized the obvious need for them to participate."