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Arizona House committee OKs bill to fund predictive policing

Ryan Van Velzer, Associated Press

Published 10:01 p.m. MT March 25, 2015 | Updated 10:02 p.m. MT March 25, 2015



(Photo: Mark Henle)

An Arizona House committee passed a bill Wednesday allotting more than \$1 million to implement a pilot program to predict where and when crime will happen. But several Arizona police departments already use similar technologies.

The bill by Sen. Steve Smith, R-Maricopa, approves the predictive policing software known as Predpol for a pilot program in Phoenix, Mesa, Maricopa and Sierra Vista. The money would come from the concealed-weapons permit fund.

The software analyzes historical crime data using algorithms to predict where crime is most likely, said Larry Samuels, chief executive officer of Predpol, who testified before the Appropriations Committee.

But Maricopa County, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe, Gilbert, Chandler and other municipalities are already using BAIR crime-analysis technologies, said Sean Bair, chief executive officer of BAIR Analytics. Arizona police departments have been using BAIR technologies since 1995, he said. In the past last few years, BAIR has updated its software to include geographic profiling, the mapping of hotspots and other predictive policing functions using 160 unique data points, he said.

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Bair said the new pilot program is a waste of taxpayer dollars. "Our solution does more than Predpol, and it's already included in the technology they have. It would be a complete waste of taxpayer money," he said.

A crime analyst with the Scottsdale Police Department said current software allows police to map specific crimes such as thefts and burglaries to see where and when they are occurring and are most likely to occur in the future. Analysts can also share data with police departments in neighboring cities using the current software.

"We're definitely happy with what we currently have, and it does work very well for everything that we use it for in our agencies," said Mike Winslow, police analyst.

Senate Bill 1293 passed the Appropriations Committee on a 13-1 vote, and it now moves to the floor pending a standard review.

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