

May 25, 2016

VIA EMAIL

Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson
State Capitol, Room 2032
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4019

Re: S.B. 868 – Oppose Unless Amended

Dear Sen. Jackson,

I am writing today on behalf of the Aerial Sports League (ASL) to respectfully voice our opposition to S.B. 868, unless the bill is amended to allow hobbyists to engage in drone combat games.

First, allow me to explain who we are and what we do. Founded in 2011 in Northern California, the ASL leads a global community representing thousands of drone hobbyist dogfighters across the country. We are perhaps best known for organizing “Game of Drones” events, one of the family-friendly highlights of the annual Bay Area Maker Faire. At these competitions, hobbyist drone pilots go head-to-head to try to knock each other out of the air—all in a secure arena, contained by safety nets. Often these drones have been outfitted with rudimentary offensive capabilities, such as melee weapons, “net guns,” dangling fishing wire or ribbons, all designed to foul another drone’s propellers.

S.B. 868 poses significant challenges for the continued operation of these games. Section 21757 states: “A person shall not weaponize a remote piloted aircraft or operate a weaponized remote piloted aircraft,” with a criminal penalty attached to violations of the section. As currently written, the bill neither defines “weaponize” or provide exceptions for hobbyist combat drones that pose no threat to person or property outside a gaming context.

Aerial Sports League and Game of Drones is a three-time winner of the “Best in Show” for Maker Faire and have developed a STEM educational program with drone combat games at the core of the curriculum. ASL is currently partnered with Hiller Aviation Museum, The Innovation Hangar at the Palace of Fine Arts, and other institutions to provide ongoing drone build-a-thon workshops for youth and adults, sharing the skills needed to build, safely fly—and register your drone with the FAA. These ASL initiatives are due in part to drone combat games’ accessibility for enthusiasts young and old as a gateway to computer programming, math, science, engineering and so many other beneficial skills. In fact, many of our competitors are youth who see drone sports as a way to pursue larger educational futures in aviation, engineering, and technology. While we understand the intent of your proposed prohibition on weaponized drones, this legislation should not criminalize innocent hobbyist activities that promote positive innovation, education and an interest in technology and engineering.

We are opposed to this bill as currently structured and ask that you take steps to ensure that drone sports enthusiasts are allowed to continue their pursuits without running afoul of the law.

Enclosed please find several links to short videos and articles that demonstrate the positive aspects of the drone combat sports community. Please do not hesitate to contact me with further questions or concerns. We would certainly be happy to engage with your office to explain more about drone combat games and ways that legislation may be amended to address everyone’s concerns.

Sincerely,

Marque Cornblatt
Founder, CEO
Aerial Sports League