

# Killer Hobby

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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This year, Fox introduced a new cop drama called ‘APB.’ The show is about Gideon Reeves, a tech billionaire whose business partner was killed. Seeking justice, Reeves purchases a failing police precinct in Chicago and uses his money and tech-savvy to give it an overhaul.

Reeves’ officers get to use cool gadgets, such as beefed up cars and motorcycles, enhanced surveillance equipment and, of course, drones outfitted with cameras and guns. Like many TV shows, ‘APB’ is fun because it mixes drama with fantasy.

Or, maybe it mixes drama with reality.

The Connecticut legislature is currently pondering whether the state should become the first in the nation to allow the police to use drones equipped with deadly weapons. The proposed bill would ban the use of weaponized drones, however, the ban would not apply to the police.

To use a drone, the proposal would require police to first obtain a warrant, unless there was an emergency circumstance or the person who is the subject of the drone use gave permission. Officers would be obligated to receive training prior to using a drone armed with weapons. Each year, the police would also be required to report on how often they use drones and why, and create new crimes and penalties for criminal use of drones, including voyeurism.

The specifics on how law enforcement could actually use drones with weapons would be specified in rules to be developed by the state Police Officer Standards and Training Council.

Again, if the bill passes, Connecticut would be the first state to allow police to use drones armed with deadly weapons. North Dakota is the only state that currently allows police to use weaponized drones, however, the weapons allowed are “less lethal,” including stun guns, rubber bullets and tear gas.

Wisconsin, along with Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon and Vermont, all have laws that prohibit anyone from using an armed drone. Maine and Virginia have laws that specifically ban police from using weaponized drones, while several other states have restricted drone use in general.

The measure has obviously garnered a lot of attention, as well as a lot of concern by civil rights and civil liberties advocates.

Scot X. Esdaile, president of the Connecticut chapter of the NAACP, has said, “We have huge concerns that they would use this new technology to abuse our communities.” He also claims to have received calls from around the country from other NAACP officials concerned about the proposal.

David McGuire, executive director of Connecticut’s ACLU is worried about the law “setting a dangerous precedent.” He believes that attaching deadly weapons or riot deterrents, such as tear gas, to drones would make it much easier for a police officer to use force. “There’s a level of separation that makes it almost video game like where they’re detached from the actual situation,” he told CBS New York.

Republican state Senator John Kissel, co-chairman of the Judiciary Committee that overwhelmingly approved the measure, explained that weaponized drones would be used in very limited circumstances, such as “some incident on some campus or someplace where someone is a rogue shooter or someone was kidnapped and you try to blow out a tire.”

The bill is currently on the floor of the House of Representatives, so we’ll have to wait to see if it passes or gets shot down.

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