The effect of the Williamson rule is to oblige arresting/booking officers and prosecutors to identify possible alternative charges under special statutes and not simply to opt for the most-familiar charges or those providing the greatest punishment. Here are some illustrative cases, in which convictions were reversed for violation of the Williamson rule:

- **People v. Joseph (2019)** ___ Cal.App.5th __ , No. B285062—filing a false report of a stolen vehicle should be prosecuted under the special misdemeanor section VC § 10501(a), rather than under the general felony perjury section, PC § 118(a).
- **People v. Sun (2018)** 29 Cal.App.5th 946—discharging a laser at an occupied aircraft must be prosecuted under the special statute, PC § 247.5, not as an ADW under the more general statute, PC § 245.
- **People v. Henry (2018)** 28 Cal.App.5th 786—signing a false or fictitious name on a promise to appear on a traffic citation falls under the special misdemeanor statute, VC § 40504(b), instead of the general felony false personation section, PC § 529(a)(3).
• In re Fernando C. (2014) 227 Cal.App.4th 499—fighting on school grounds in violation of special statute PC § 415.5 cannot be prosecuted under the more general section, PC § 415.

• People v. Murphy (2011) 52 Cal.4th 81—filing a false report of vehicle theft, a misdemeanor under special statute, VC § 10501(a), cannot be prosecuted under the general felony statute for offering false documents for filing, PC § 115(a).

• People v. Duran (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 666—the special misdemeanor statute on furnishing false information on a firearm application, PC § 28210(b), preempts charges under general statutes for attempted possession of a firearm by a felon, §§ 664/29800(a)(1).

• Finn v. Superior Court (1984) 156 Cal.App.3d 268—fraudulently obtaining money from the sale of a mobile home, a misdemeanor under the special statutes, H&S §§ 18060.5(c) and 18020.5, cannot be prosecuted as felony grand theft under general section PC § 487.

• In determining appropriate charges to be filed, the prosecutor should consider not only the potential charges identified by arresting/booking officers, but also alternative offenses supported by the admissible evidence—including the violation of special statutes addressing the defendant’s particular conduct. Probable cause to file criminal charges “is not confined to the charge invoked by the officer at the time of arrest or to closely-related charges.” Schmidlin v. Palo Alto (2007) 157 Cal.App.4th 728, 779.

BOTTOM LINE: The “Williamson rule” usually requires that conduct proscribed by a special criminal statute be prosecuted under that statute, rather than under a more general one.