



LOS ANGELES COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

SACRAMENTO LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

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March 15, 2023

Senator Lena A. Gonzalez
Chair, Senate Transportation Committee
State Capitol, Room 405
Sacramento, CA 95814

SENATE BILL 55

SPONSOR

Senate Transportation Committee

Dear Senator Gonzalez:

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office is pleased to sponsor Senate Bill 55 (Umberg).

Catalytic converter thefts have reached epidemic levels both nationally and in California. Nationally, there has been a 1,215% increase in these thefts since 2019. A recent report released by State Farm Insurance showed that California leads the nation in the number of catalytic converter thefts. In Los Angeles County, the Sheriff's Department reported a 400% increase in catalytic converter thefts from 2019 to 2020. Across California, catalytic converter replacements increased more than 90% in 2020. State Farm paid over \$15 million for 5456 catalytic converter theft claims in California in 2022, and they paid over \$50 million nationwide in just the first half of 2022.

Catalytic converters, which are emissions control devices located underneath a vehicle, restrict carbon monoxide from coming out of a vehicle's tailpipe. Catalytic converters contain three valuable metals, including platinum, rhodium and palladium which is why they are stolen in such large numbers. Thieves can sell catalytic converters for hundreds, even thousands of dollars depending on the size of the parts stolen.

While the number of catalytic converter thefts skyrocket across California, there are significant legal challenges to investigating and prosecuting these crimes under California's existing statutes. These motor vehicle parts are very valuable and easily removed by thieves. Most major vehicle parts such as the engine block, transmission, frame, doors, and firewall sold in the United States are identified by an imprinted serial number relating to the unique vehicle identification number (VIN). These identification markings allow law enforcement to establish that parts are stolen, even if the stolen vehicle has already been fully broken down. However, this serial number identification process currently does not apply to catalytic converters, and as such,

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vehicle manufacturers do not mark these parts with a serial number. Consequently, law enforcement may arrest individuals in possession of hundreds of suspected stolen catalytic converters but be unable to prove a single case in court because without any identifying markers, it is impossible to determine the source of these parts. Unless police catch these individuals in the act of theft, there is virtually no way to identify the crime victims to prove that the parts were stolen. This legal loophole has resulted in an explosion in catalytic converter thefts, which currently is a crime that brings high profits with very little fear of legal repercussions.

SB 55 would close this loophole by adding section 24020 to the Vehicle Code to require new and used car dealers to mark the catalytic converters of vehicles on sale, with some specified exceptions. The application of a VIN to a catalytic converter is usually done by etching, a process that is both easy and inexpensive. However, the bill would allow for other forms of permanent marking as well. SB 55 would also amend Business and Professions Code section 21610 to require a traceable method of payment for core recyclers when purchasing used catalytic converters from sellers.

SB 55 is necessary to combat the overwhelming surge in catalytic converter thefts which have placed an enormous burden on the victims of these crimes. The changes proposed by this bill aim to deter would-be thieves from engaging in these thefts in the first place and to assist law enforcement in apprehending those individuals who choose to commit these crimes.

For these reasons, we respectfully request an **AYE** vote on SB 55.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Tamar Tokat in our Legislative Office at (916) 442-0668.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George Gascón", written in a cursive style.

GEORGE GASCÓN
District Attorney

cc: Senator Tom Umberg
Senator Anthony Portantino
Members, Senate Transportation Committee