

HCS HBs 1420 & 527 -- AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

SPONSOR: Mayhew

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Crime and Public Safety by a vote of 18 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HBs 1420 & 527.

This bill creates the "Auto Theft Prevention Program". Under the program, law enforcement agencies and other qualified applicants can apply for grants for automobile theft prevention and the prosecution of automobile theft.

The supervision, authority, and control of the Program will be at the discretion of the Auto Theft Prevention Commission, which the bill establishes. Allocation of money by the Commission, including awarding grants, will receive approval from the Director of the Department of Public Safety.

The bill details the Commission's membership, and will include the Superintendent of the State Highway Patrol or their designee and several people appointed by the Governor from specific departments, agencies, bureaus, and associations. A consumer who has been impacted by automobile theft will also be appointed to the Commission.

This bill explains the details of the Commission members' terms and appointments. Members of the Commission will serve without compensation, except reimbursement for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. The State Highway Patrol will provide the administration, management, and organization of the Commission's activities and grant programs. Subject to available funding, the Commission can appoint a director, who can employ necessary staff to operate and administer the Program. These operation and administration costs will not exceed eight percent.

The bill requires the Commission to establish a grant program for the provision of funds to local law enforcement agencies and multi-jurisdictional task forces for purposes detailed in this bill related to motor vehicle-related crime reduction and prevention. The Commission will also promote statewide coordination and provide support to local prosecutors and multi-jurisdictional task forces.

The Commission will solicit and select applications for grants to fund programs addressing motor vehicle theft. This bill explains the application and selection process. It also gives a non-

exclusive list of the types of programs that will receive available funding. The Executive Director of the Department of Public Safety will make rules for the administration of the program as detailed in the bill.

The bill requires applicants that receive a grant to submit a report to the Commission concerning the implementation of the program funded via the grant by December 1, 2026. The Commission will report to the Judiciary Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives on the implementation of the programs receiving grants by February 1, 2027. The details of this report's requirements are included in the bill.

This bill increases the fee for a certificate of ownership of a motor vehicle or trailer from eight to 13 dollars. It creates the "Auto Theft Prevention Commission Revolving Fund", which will receive all funds paid for those certificates and can receive and use funds granted by Congress, Executive Order, gifts, and donations. Money remaining in the fund will not automatically revert to the General Revenue Fund.

The provisions of the bill will automatically terminate after six years unless reauthorized by an act of the General Assembly.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this bill creates the Auto Theft Prevention Commission. The goal of this Commission is to prevent and solve auto theft. There are 16 other states that are doing this successfully. In St. Louis, at the end of 2024, there were 4,151 stolen vehicles. Missouri ranks 10th in the nation for auto theft. In 2024, over 23,500 vehicles were stolen. The value of these stolen vehicles is in the multi millions if the cars are valued at an average of \$15,000. Any time we prevent these thefts and recover stolen vehicles, it will mitigate the damage. It is all too easy to steal a car and sell it to someone else and the sale appears to the buyer to be legitimate. There is a funding mechanism for the Commission, and that funding will be more than is needed to run the Commission, so the remainder will provide grants to local law enforcement agencies to help alleviate some of the stresses in the auto theft industry. This is a valuable resource for law enforcement agencies.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Mayhew; Arnie Dienoff; National Insurance Crime Bureau; Missouri Insurance Coalition; and Enterprise Mobility.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say the auto theft recovery agent for the Highway Patrol has personally recovered 1,000 vehicles in the last year. Missouri has a significant auto theft problem. This is not just a big city problem; it is a Statewide problem. Not every vehicle has full coverage insurance, and the people who do not have full coverage really have no recourse if their car is stolen and, even if it is recovered, it is not serviceable. Currently, the St. Louis County Police Department has two vehicle theft investigators, and the Highway Patrol has only one. The investigator witness described a phenomenon that started in 2021 called "the Kia boys and Hyundai girls," consisting mostly of juveniles stealing cars. Once they realized how easy it was to steal these vehicles, they posted videos on the internet and it caused more of these vehicles to be stolen. Now these cars are being stolen for many reasons, including reselling them, cutting them up and using them for parts in other vehicles, or even for sleeping in them. They are also stolen prior to the commission of a separate offense. There are also key programs for vehicles that did not exist before, so law enforcement needs to continue training and evolving to keep up with stolen vehicles. The key programs would allow a person to change the programmed keys for a vehicle to other keys and the owner's keys would be rendered useless.

Testifying in person on the bill was Nate Bradley, Missouri State Highway Patrol.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.