

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Comprehensive Plan to Combat Auto Theft in New Jersey

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Proposed Legislation and Administrative Action Will Work Together to Decrease Auto Theft Across the State

EWING – Governor Phil Murphy, alongside Senate President Nick Scutari and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, today announced his support for a series of legislative proposals and administrative actions to combat auto theft in New Jersey. Today’s announcement builds upon steps taken earlier this year, which have already proven to have an impact. Auto thefts in September of this year were down 14 percent from September of last year. And in October, auto thefts were down 12 percent from October of last year.

“I am grateful for the collaborative work that has been done across government in partnership with law enforcement at the state and local levels to combat crime in our state,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Today’s steps, which include increasing penalties for persistent auto theft offenders and criminalizing certain conduct related to auto theft tools and catalytic converters, will strengthen this administration’s efforts to reverse the uptick in vehicle theft we have witnessed over the past few years. However, we also ask that our residents take additional measures to protect themselves from auto theft. If you cannot park your car in a closed and locked garage, make sure that your vehicle is locked and that the key fob is with you.”

The Governor announced his support for a series of legislative measures to combat auto theft. Some versions of these measures have already been introduced, and the Governor looks forward to working with legislative leadership and the sponsors to advance these reforms through the legislative process. The Governor proposed:

1. Establishing a persistent auto theft offender statute, which would give state and local prosecutors the option to seek more serious criminal consequences for those who have been repeatedly found guilty of stealing cars.
2. Making possession and distribution of certain auto theft tools a crime.
3. Imposing criminal penalties for the failure to comply with certain guidelines in the sale and purchase of catalytic converters.
4. Investing in enhanced pretrial services, which will reduce the risk from individuals who are awaiting trial. This will include:
 1. Pretrial monitoring by law enforcement.
 2. Expansion of the use of house arrest paired with location monitoring.
 3. Providing additional resources related to substance abuse, mental health, and housing insecurity.

The Governor also announced that the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) will start working to add a check box to vehicle registration paperwork allowing residents to “opt in” to a program that automatically permits law enforcement to track participating registered vehicles if a vehicle is ever stolen. Additionally, MVC will focus on messaging the importance to new drivers of safely handling key fobs by not leaving them inside the car or stored in their home too close to the car.

“The Murphy Administration continues to take a comprehensive approach to keeping New Jersey residents safe. Particularly when it comes to combating the rise in auto thefts, we are deploying every tool possible—creative legislation, technological investments, and traditional enforcement. Public safety will always be our top priority,” **said New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin**.

“Auto theft not only victimizes the owner of the vehicle, but it can also victimize the whole community. Stolen vehicles are often used in the commission of crimes and can be found driving recklessly on our roadways creating a dangerous environment for everyone,” **said Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police**. “The support Governor Murphy has provided with the additional resources have proven to be pivotal in our effort to combat this national issue. Those resources added with the new legislative and administrative steps shows this state’s commitment to supporting not only law enforcement but it’s commitment to the safety of all New Jersey residents.”

“I can only commend the all-hands-on-deck approach that Governor Murphy has taken to combat the rise in auto thefts in New Jersey,” **said Motor Vehicle Commission Acting Chief Administrator Latrecia Littles-Floyd**. “The initiatives announced today will give law enforcement a new tool to help track down stolen vehicles and boost public awareness about the importance of securing key fobs. Working closely with our partners in law enforcement, we will continue to maximize our efforts at MVC to help reduce vehicle thefts.”

“The alarming increase in auto thefts threatens the property and the safety of New Jersey residents in their communities,” **said Senate President Scutari**. “These crimes are especially disturbing because they’re so close to home. Criminals are stealing cars right out of people’s driveways and garages. It’s crucial we take additional steps to deter car thieves and support police departments throughout the state.”

“Car thefts are plaguing communities across our state,” **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. “We must protect public safety and ensure justice is delivered for the sake of all New Jersey families and our law enforcement. Every community deserves peace of mind. As we step up our efforts to mitigate, disincentivize and dismantle car theft rings, I applaud the ongoing response of the Attorney General and I remind folks to please stay vigilant.”

“In response to a recent increase in automobile thefts across the state, I am proud to stand with Governor Murphy in taking swift and comprehensive action to combat this issue,” **said Senator Linda Greenstein**. “As Chairwoman of the Law and Public Safety Committee, safeguarding our residents’ property and upholding community safety and security standards, is of the utmost importance.”

“With support from Governor Murphy, Attorney General Platkin, Speaker Coughlin, Senate President Scutari and law enforcement agencies, the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee will be holding a public hearing to discuss combatting auto theft. We plan to isolate the problem, hear from our community and stakeholders to find solutions to address this issue. It is our responsibility in the legislature to ensure our communities are safe from crime, and rest easy knowing their representatives are working to solve the problem of automotive theft,” **said Assemblyman Bill Spearman**.

Earlier this year, Governor Murphy announced a \$10 million investment in automated license plate recognition (ALPR) technology to reduce violent crime and auto theft in New Jersey through the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) State Fiscal Recovery Fund.

In addition, Attorney General Platkin announced in March that additional resources would be allocated to grow the Auto Theft Task Force (ATTF). Since then, both the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) and the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) have added additional detectives and prosecutors to the ATTF. \$125,000 in federal Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funds were also immediately provided to bolster the resources and capabilities of the ATTF, including law enforcement personnel and equipment purchases.

Attorney General Platkin has also revised the police pursuit policy to explicitly permit the pursuit of stolen cars, among other efforts.

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