

Maryland
Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

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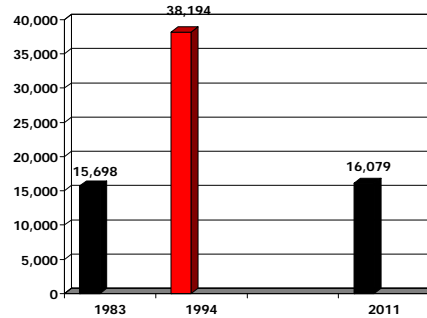
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MARYLAND VEHICLE THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

Vehicle theft in Maryland increased 143% from 1983 (15,688) to 1994 (38,194). Nationally, vehicle theft rose 51% during the same period of time. In response to rapidly escalating vehicle theft rates, the 1994 General Assembly created the Vehicle Theft Prevention Council (Council) and Vehicle Theft Prevention Fund (Fund) to centralize, consolidate, and coordinate vehicle theft prevention planning and funding capabilities. Consistent with enabling legislation, the Council has developed and implemented a Plan of Operation and a statewide vehicle theft prevention strategy. The plan encompasses public awareness/prevention/education, juvenile intervention, law enforcement, and prosecution. Since its inception, the Council has awarded over thirty million dollars for vehicle theft prevention programs to various organizations consistent with the statewide strategy. These programs have been concentrated in eight jurisdictions in the Baltimore/Washington corridor which historically experiences 93-95 percent of the vehicle thefts in Maryland.

STATE OF MARYLAND VEHICLE THEFT 1983, 1994, 2011



HISTORY

The rapid increase in vehicle theft and the advent of “Carjacking” became a serious public safety problem. In 1992 the Governor’s Commission on Vehicle Theft and Related Crime was established to examine all aspects of vehicle theft. Their purpose was to develop strategies and recommendations to counter the problem. In response to the Commission’s recommendations, the Maryland General Assembly created the Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Fund (Fund) and the Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council (Council) to assist in prevention and future deterrence of vehicle theft and related crimes. The mandate of the Fund and Council was to centralize, consolidate and coordinate vehicle theft prevention planning and funding capabilities on a statewide basis. Except for the funding mechanism, this concept was designed to emulate the successful Automobile Theft Prevention Authorities (ATPA) that had proven to be highly successful in Michigan, Texas, and Illinois.

MARYLAND VEHICLE THEFT PREVENTION FUND

Automobile Theft Prevention Authorities in other states assess automobile insurance companies \$1.00 per vehicle insurance policy which is dedicated to the corresponding ATPA for vehicle theft prevention programs. Because of a strong insurance lobby, the Maryland Legislature rejected this funding method. Instead, \$2 million per fiscal year was provided to the Council from the Maryland Lapsed and Terminated Insurance Fund. As with other states, automobile insurance in Maryland is mandatory. Once that insurance lapses or is terminated, all evidence of vehicle registration must be returned to the Motor Vehicle Administration within 48 hours. Failure to do so results in a \$150.00 penalty for the first 30 days. After 30 days, the penalty increases to \$7.00 per day, up to \$2,500.00 per vehicle. Maryland vigorously enforces and collects these penalties which amount to several million dollars per year.

MARYLAND VEHICLE THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL

The Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council is established as a Unit within the Department of Maryland State Police. The Council consists of 13 members appointed by the Governor. The Secretaries of the Department of Maryland State Police, Department of Public Safety, Department of Juvenile Services, and the Motor Vehicle Administrator all serve Ex Officio; Other members represent: Local Law Enforcement, Maryland State's Attorney's Association, a Domestic Auto Insurer (GEICO), a Foreign Auto Insurer (State Farm), the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), Three citizens, one of which must represent a Community Organization and a representative of the Governor's Office.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COUNCIL

Through Grant Awards, the Council supports programs intended to reduce vehicle theft, improve administration of motor vehicle theft laws, create programs directed at reducing vehicle theft by juveniles, enhance vehicle theft prosecutorial efforts, inform motor vehicle owners of financial and social costs of vehicle theft and teach methods of vehicle theft prevention. To accomplish these objectives the Council is mandated to:

- ❖ Assess the scope of the vehicle theft problem in Maryland and identify areas of the State where the incidence of theft is the greatest.

- ❖ Review and evaluate the adequacy of existing vehicle theft data collection and determine what additional research and analysis of vehicle thefts are needed.
- ❖ Provide a forum for identification of problems associated with vehicle theft.
- ❖ Analyze State and Local programs and propose plans and methods for preventing vehicle theft.
- ❖ Develop statewide strategies and sponsor programs to prevent vehicle theft.
- ❖ Review existing motor vehicle laws, regulations and procedures and identify the policies or practices that inadvertently facilitate the registration and transportation of stolen vehicles.
- ❖ Support programs designed to prevent vehicle theft by providing financial assistance to State and Local law enforcement agencies, local prosecutor's offices, and neighborhood community or business organizations.
- ❖ Provide financial support for a variety of programs targeting juveniles including education and prevention, adjudication and sentencing; and remediation treatment programs.
- ❖ Conduct educational programs to inform vehicle owners of methods of preventing theft and protecting their personal safety while operating a motor vehicle.
- ❖ Establish priorities for allocation and disbursement of funds made available to the Council.
- ❖ Develop Grant criteria and Application; Award and monitor Grants.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUNCIL

The Council has the following powers and duties:

- ❖ To make Grants and Awards from the Fund for motor vehicle theft intervention programs.

- ❖ To solicit and accept funds for deposit to the Fund to be used to carry out the purposes of the Council.
- ❖ To establish or assist in the establishment of programs designed to reduce the incidence of vehicle theft and related crimes.
- ❖ To identify priorities for theft prevention strategies in the State and criteria for the Council's evaluation of Grant Programs.
- ❖ To study and propose laws that will further prevent and deter vehicle theft and related crime.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE COUNCIL

The Council is administered by an Executive Director and sufficient clerical and financial resources to carry out its duties. The Executive Director is employed by the Council and appointed by the Governor. All administrative and operational costs are paid from the Fund, but may not exceed seven percent of total expenditures from the Fund in any Fiscal Year.

STATEWIDE VEHICLE THEFT PREVENTION STRATEGY

In developing a statewide vehicle theft prevention strategy, the Council has embraced the following programmatic approach based on past experiences and efforts in other states which have proven effective in vehicle theft prevention.

- ❖ Public Awareness/Prevention/Education
- ❖ Vehicle Theft by Juveniles
- ❖ Law Enforcement/Detection/Apprehension
- ❖ Prosecution/Adjudication/Conviction

Among the organizations that may want to apply for grants are county and municipal governments, local law enforcement agencies, local prosecutors' offices, local school systems, institutions of higher education, State agencies, neighborhood, community or business organizations. Collaborative programs involving local law enforcement agencies and

community organizations are strongly encouraged. All organizations receiving funds from the Council will be required to measure, evaluate and report on the effectiveness of their efforts.

Eligible Programs

As provided in Public Safety Article 2-703, the following entities and programs will be considered for funding:

- ❖ State and local law enforcement agencies, to enhance or augment vehicle theft enforcement and prevention teams or efforts;
- ❖ State and local law enforcement agencies, for programs designed to reduce the incidence of vehicle theft;
- ❖ Local prosecutors and judicial agencies, for enhanced prosecution and adjudication of vehicle theft crimes;
- ❖ Neighborhood or community organizations or business organizations, for programs designed to reduce the incidence of vehicle theft;
- ❖ Educational programs designed to inform motor vehicle owners of methods of preventing motor vehicle theft and to provide equipment, for experimental purposes, to enable motor vehicle owners to prevent motor vehicle theft;
- ❖ Programs designed to reduce the incidence of juvenile vehicle theft and recidivism; and
- ❖ Programs designed to reduce or deter damage or vandalism to a vehicle in connection with a vehicle theft or theft of property from a vehicle.

Prevention/Education

Although it may be difficult to measure the effectiveness of prevention activities, the Council has established this category to include programs that promote public awareness, provide public training in theft prevention measures, and support prevention programs.

Statistics indicate that in 60% of the cases of auto theft, owners left doors unlocked; and in 25% of the cases, keys were left in the ignition. Without prevention efforts and support from the public, law enforcement alone cannot effectively prevent vehicle thefts in Maryland. Public education campaigns and prevention training programs can increase individual awareness of the costs of vehicle theft, provide tips for vehicle owners to prevent thefts, and demonstrate the savings that preventive measures yield.

In an effort to assure maximum effectiveness and statewide coverage of a prevention campaign, the Council may give preference to applications covering multiple jurisdictions. Partnerships promoting vehicle theft prevention programs between local law enforcement agencies and community organizations are strongly encouraged.

Examples of prevention programs that may be funded are:

- ❖ Programs that inform and educate the community about the vehicle theft problem through block club organizations, neighborhood watch programs, and schools.
- ❖ Programs to stimulate public awareness about the economic, social, and public safety consequences of vehicle theft.
- ❖ Programs to inform and encourage public participation in theft prevention and enforcement efforts.
- ❖ Partnership programs among local government, law enforcement agencies and community organizations directed at preventing vehicle theft and educating members in vehicle theft prevention measures.
- ❖ Programs to identify and promote the use of effective vehicle anti-theft devices.

Vehicle Theft by Juveniles

Maryland communities were experiencing a large incidence of vehicle thefts committed by juveniles. According to the 1993 Maryland Uniform Crime Report, 55 percent of all arrests for vehicle theft in Maryland involve individuals under the age of 18 years. In 2010 that had dramatically decreased to 38%. Current technology has made it increasingly harder to bypass ignition systems and accounts for a part of this decline.

A percentage of funds will be specifically dedicated to juvenile service agencies to develop programmatic initiatives with specific vehicle theft offense components and to improve data collection to enhance the research and analysis capabilities concerning juveniles involved in vehicle theft and related offenses.

Schools may be an effective setting for presenting special programs to large groups of young people, as with the success of D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) in the area of substance abuse prevention. Current study data indicates a need to influence juveniles in both middle and high schools about the consequences of vehicle theft.

Examples of programs that may be funded:

- ❖ Pilot programs utilizing intensive social services programs to enhance the quality of family environment for repeat juvenile vehicle theft offenders.
- ❖ Pilot programs in cooperation with other agencies directed at prevention of vehicle theft in communities experiencing a high incidence of juvenile involvement in vehicle theft.
- ❖ Programs by state and local school systems directed at reducing the number of new juveniles committing vehicle theft offenses. This approach would include specific vehicle theft prevention programs incorporated in a social responsibility curriculum within the schools.
- ❖ Emphasis on prosecution and adjudication on repeat juvenile vehicle theft offenders.

Law Enforcement/Detection/Apprehension

Vehicle theft often transcends jurisdictional boundaries. For this reason, enforcement efforts covering multiple jurisdictions are encouraged and may receive priority for funding. Multi-jurisdictional efforts may include, but are not limited to, several municipalities, counties, or regions. In addition, law enforcement agencies should include community leaders and community organizations in both planning and implementing vehicle theft prevention grant programs.

Funds may be allocated for the establishment of multi-agency vehicle theft enforcement teams and other detection/apprehension programs. Funding may be provided for state, county and municipal enforcement efforts that target areas having significant motor vehicle theft problems.

Vehicle theft detection and apprehension programs may include, but are not limited to, community involvement programs, detection training programs, and enhancements to information-gathering programs. Community involvement programs have proven their effectiveness with increased area arrests and recovery statistics.

Detection training programs include inspection procedures, identification of fraudulent titles, investigation of suspicious claims and development of fraud profiles, and investigative methods unique to the crime of motor vehicle theft.

Accurate data compiled by information-gathering systems is required to properly assess the vehicle theft problem and to measure the effectiveness of programs to prevent theft. Programs addressing enhancements to intelligence-gathering systems will be considered for funding.

Examples of enforcement/detection/apprehension programs that may be funded are:

- ❖ **Multi-jurisdictional investigative teams to conduct:**
 - Proactive investigations focusing on career criminals and organizations involved in motor vehicle theft activities through the use of surveillance, bait cars, sting operations, and other innovative investigative techniques.
 - Proactive investigations directed at identifying and eliminating dismantling (chop shop) operations and marketing of stolen essential parts.
 - Proactive and reactive techniques to address the growing problem of insurance and title fraud.
 - Proactive and investigative techniques to address the growing problem of exportation of stolen vehicles.
- ❖ **Development of confidential sources of information directed at identifying individuals/organizations involved in all aspects of motor vehicle theft.**
- ❖ **Enhanced case management techniques.**
- ❖ **Use of mobile in-car data and license plate readers systems directed at a street level approach to quickly identify stolen cars on parking lots, at motels,**

apartments, train stations, bus stations, airports, etc.

- ❖ **Salvage yard audit teams directed at reducing markets for stolen vehicle parts through an aggressive program of auditing salvage yards, repairers, rebuilders, and scrap processors. Auditors also may track the flow of salvage vehicles and their titles statewide.**

- ❖ **Statewide vehicle theft and prevention training for law enforcement personnel directed at recognition, detection, investigation, enforcement, and prosecution techniques.**
 - **Enhance basic training.**

 - **Enhance in-service training.**

 - **Develop advanced and specialist courses for full-time vehicle theft investigators.**

- ❖ **Programs to combat vehicle theft at the street level.**

- ❖ **Programs to reduce the incidence of insurance fraud.**

- ❖ **Programs for information-gathering systems to target repeat offenders and high theft areas.**

- ❖ **Programs for information-gathering systems to assist in measuring program effectiveness. Enhance the collection, analysis, storage, and dissemination of strategic tactical intelligence information relating to vehicle theft.**

- ❖ **Participation in interstate and international intelligence networks, such as the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators, and various fusion centers nationwide.**

Prosecution/Adjudication/Conviction

- ❖ Funding may be provided for prosecution and judicial programs designed to assist with the prosecution of persons charged with vehicle theft offenses. Under this category, funding may be provided for efforts to implement legislative changes that assist in the prosecution of vehicle thieves and the forfeiture of their property.

The prosecution of vehicle theft cases usually has a relatively low priority at both local and state levels. This is due in part because: 1) staffs are limited and consumed with prosecution of violent crimes; 2) vehicle theft is a property crime as opposed to personal crime; 3) the victim receives insurance compensation; and 4) vehicle theft prosecutions are often complex and expensive in comparison to resultant penalties.

Despite these constraints, prosecution and conviction of automobile thieves is one of the most important means of breaking vehicle theft rings and reducing the economic incentives of vehicle theft. Having a special prosecutor handle vehicle theft cases vertically through both district and circuit courts has proven very effective in achieving convictions.

The following programs provide examples of prosecution/adjudication programs that may be funded:

- ❖ Additional prosecution staff to concentrate on vehicle theft cases to increase prosecutions, increase convictions, and attack career thieves, chop shop operators, salvage yard operators, including organized theft rings through aggressive vertical prosecution.
- ❖ Workshops designed to train assistant prosecuting attorneys who specialize in vehicle theft prosecution.
- ❖ Programs to introduce and support legislative changes.
- ❖ Programs to support aggressive use of habitual criminal statutes.

ANTI-CAR THEFT COMMITTEE

In 1997 the Council organized the Maryland Anti-Car Theft Committee (A.C.T.) As a public/private partnership between the Council, automobile insurance carriers, and other vehicle related organizations.

The A.C.T. Committee has been formally incorporated in Maryland as a 501(c3) nonprofit tax exempt organization. The primary function of the A.C.T. Committee is to organize and fund various public awareness /education/prevention programs throughout Maryland, thereby enhancing and broadening the base of the Council's efforts. The Council continues to partnership with the A.C.T. Committee. A.C.T. supports a statewide VIN etching campaign, a process where the vehicle's identification number (VIN) is etched into the vehicle's windows. VIN etching is known as an excellent form of vehicle theft deterrence and is offered as a "Free Service" by the A.C.T. Committee.

In 2000 A.C.T. expanded its area of responsibility to include the District of Columbia, becoming the MD-DC ACT Committee. The ACT Committee has also provided funding to the Montgomery County Police Centralized Auto Theft Team (CATT) to enhance their capabilities to access stolen car information more rapidly through portable lap top computers. They also partner with the Baltimore Regional Auto Theft Team (RATT) and provided funding to assist the startup of the Washington Area Vehicle Enforcement Team, (WAVE) and assist community policing programs in the District of Columbia.

"WATCH YOUR CAR"

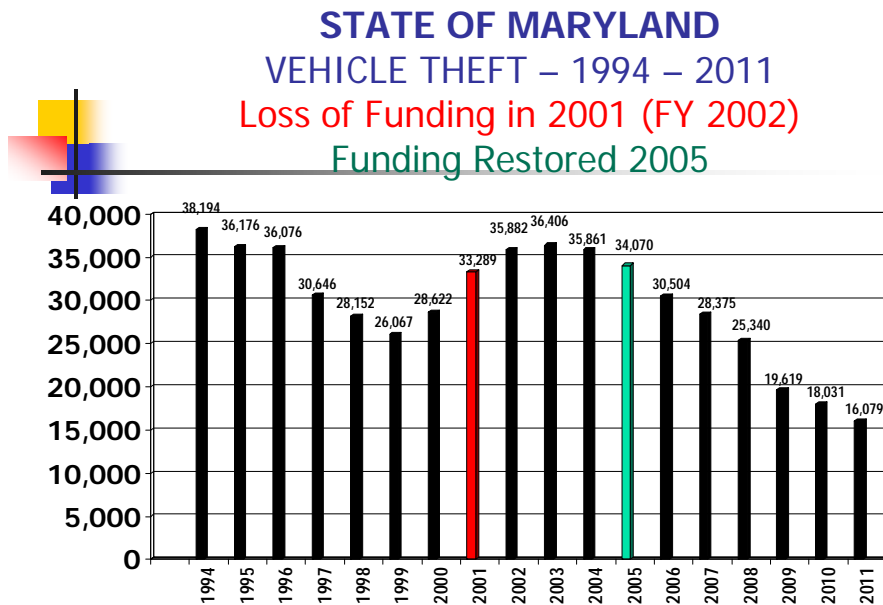
In October 1997, the Council was awarded a Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance grant to launch the national "Watch Your Car" program. Maryland was one of the first seven states to be at the forefront of this national vehicle theft prevention program. The "Watch Your Car" initiative allows motor vehicle owners to voluntarily display a reflective decal on their vehicles to alert police that the vehicle is not normally driven between the hours of 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. If the vehicle is observed being operated during these hours, the owner has consented to having the vehicle stopped by police anywhere in the United States. Police can then ensure that the vehicle is not stolen.

This program is totally voluntary and at no cost to the participants. Similar decal programs throughout the country have proven successful in the past. However, a lack of uniformity in program hours and decal designs has limited its effectiveness. The national "Watch Your Car" program brings uniformity to the concept. Police officers nationwide will come to recognize and understand the parameters including all the benefits of the "Watch Your Car" program so that it will not be limited by state and local boundaries.

This program was officially implemented in August of 1998. Currently, there are approximately 40,000 Maryland motorists registered in the program with 78 law enforcement agencies participating statewide. In 2000, the Council applied for, and received, "Watch Your Car" Supplemental Funding of \$240,000.00. This continued the program through 2003. The Council has since assumed funding responsibilities to continue this valuable program.

CONCLUSION

The Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council is in its 18th year of service to the citizens of the State of Maryland. Council programs have proven to be highly effective with direct correlation to funding levels. From 1995 – 2000, vehicle theft programs were fully funded and vehicle theft decreased 32%. From 2001 – 2004 funding levels were drastically reduced and vehicle theft increased 28%. Full funding was restored in 2005 with a corresponding decrease of 53% thru 2011. Since the Council’s inception in 1994, vehicle theft in Maryland has decreased 58% in total numbers, 61% per 100,000 vehicles registered and 55% per capita (100,000 pop.)



The staggering cost of vehicle theft in terms of lost property and criminal enterprise remains a real concern. It is the most significant property crime in the State. It is often a “gateway crime” for young offenders and in recent years there are indicators of direct ties to terrorism funding. It is also a quality of life crime that affects all citizens regardless of social or economic status. The Council remains committed to its mandate of not only reversing the vehicle theft trend, but to continue to manage theft problems in the future.

Submitted By:
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Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council**