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## Bipartisan bill proposes mandatory minimum jail sentence for car thieves

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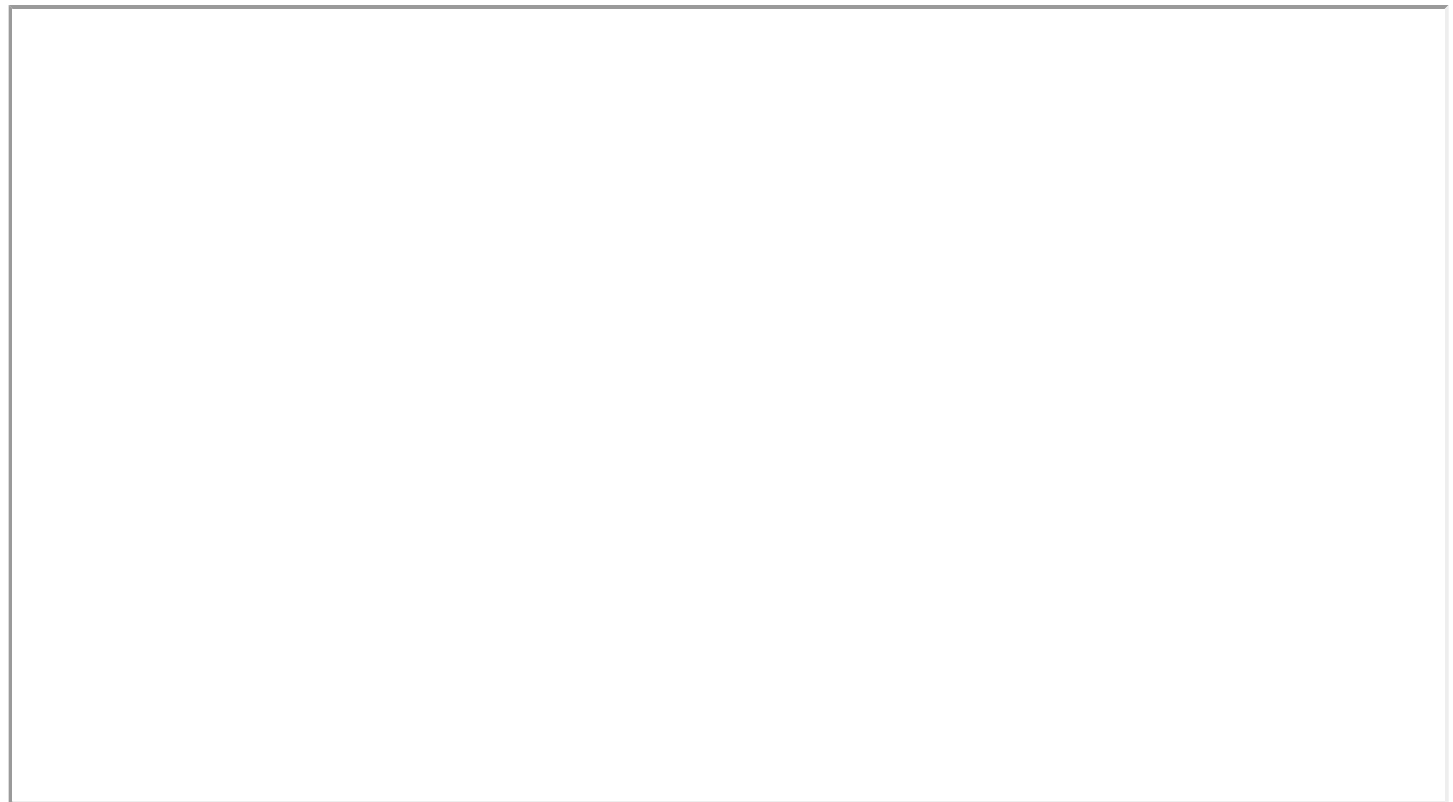
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Anchorage lawmakers announced Tuesday they've pre-filed a bill that seeks mandatory jail time for car thieves.

The measure would impose a mandatory minimum sentence of 120 days in jail for vehicle theft convictions and would allow longer sentences for cases in which aggravating factors are present.

Representative-elect Zack Fields (D-Anchorage), Rep. Andy Josephson (D-Anchorage), Rep. Geran Tarr (D-Anchorage), and Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux (R-Anchorage) will sponsor the bill in the upcoming legislative session.



"Criminals think that they can steal cars and get away with it, and we need to end catch and release policies and put criminals in jail when they steal cars," Fields said during an interview Tuesday.

The effort comes after Anchorage Police said 3,184 vehicles were reported stolen in 2017, equating to at least one car stolen in Anchorage every three hours. Anchorage's 2017 car theft total is up from 2,100 in 2016, 1,214 in 2015, and 942 in 2014.



In 2017, a car was stolen in Anchorage every three hours.

This year, APD noted [a trend involving repeat offenders](#). Several cases highlighted one individual responsible for stealing multiple cars, often while out on bail.

"One of my neighbor's car was stolen by a guy who has stolen multiple cars," Rep. Tarr said in a news release on Tuesday. "Having a vehicle stolen can lead to missed work, lost wages, missed medical appointments, and other fees and expenses. Even when vehicles are returned, they are often full of needles and drug paraphernalia that make it feel like a toxic waste site. This is costly and disruptive and must stop."

As car thieves discovered an easy way to access older model Subarus this year, [Anchorage resident Hunter Woofler's 1999 Subaru was stolen twice](#) just a matter of days.



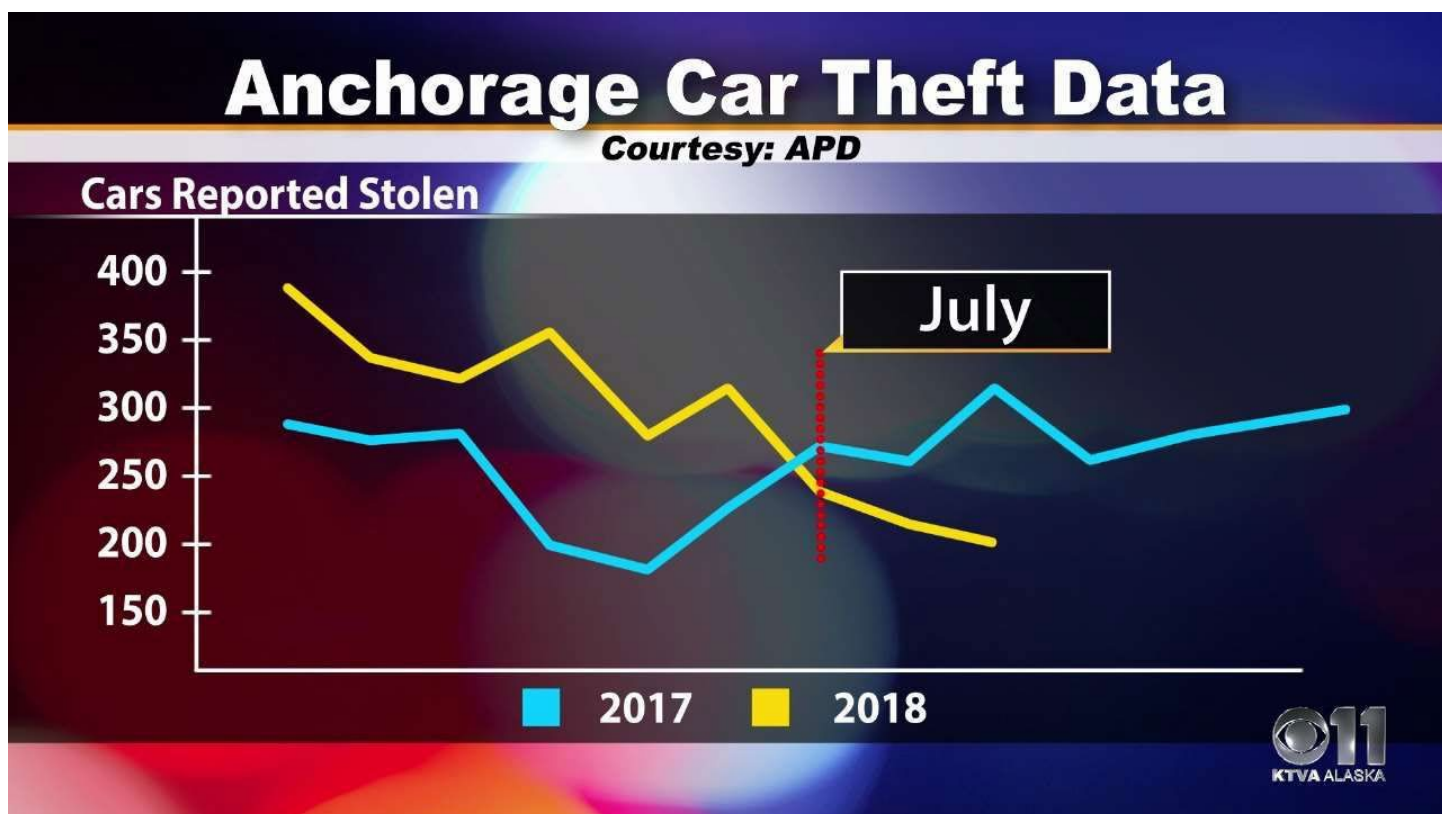
Hunter Woofter poses with his 1999 Subaru Legacy, which was stolen twice in the last week. (Photo courtesy: Hunter Woofter)

"I love Alaska and Anchorage and this community, and it breaks my heart to see this happening," Woofter said during a July interview, "I feel like the city is burning sometimes."

Following [an undercover operation in October that yielded 25 arrests and the recovery of a dozen stolen vehicles](#), APD Chief Justin Doll was cautiously optimistic the department was making a dent in Anchorage's car theft problem.

Between January and September 2017, 2,361 cars were reported stolen, compared to a higher amount of 2,684 for the same nine month period in 2018.

According to numbers from APD, something changed in July, as the rate decreased and dipped below last year's numbers through September.



875 cars were reported stolen between July and September last year. That number goes down to 659 for those same three months this year.

"When we see a steady decline like that, we're always very interested in how it's occurring. I think that, and I hope, that the effort that we've been putting in since the beginning of the year is contributing to that," Doll said during an October interview.

APD was not able to provide data for the months of October and November on Tuesday, but a spokesperson said the information would be available in the new year.

"This bill is one small step toward restoring public safety in our community," Fields said. "We also need better addiction treatment, we need better re-entry programs, but this is one part of the broader solution."

According to the release, the Anchorage Police Department Employees Association has endorsed the proposed legislation.

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