



Preventing Auto Recycling Thefts (PART) Act

A bill to prevent the theft of catalytic converters.

Issue:

The theft of catalytic converters has become rampant in the past two years, plaguing vehicle owners, scrap yards, and law enforcement officials in communities across the United States. These crimes have skyrocketed by more than 300% year over year nation-wide, and by significantly greater factors in many localities.

Theft has been nearly impossible for law enforcement to curb as current policy leaves many advantageous loopholes for criminals to exploit. A lack of criminal code in regard to the trafficking of these stolen parts, means that law enforcement must essentially catch a criminal in the act of removing the part in order to make a case. Lack of traceable identifying marks on the parts allow criminals to launder the parts by selling to local middlemen who buy stolen parts from thieves under the guise of being a “core buyer” to then sell the parts or their broken-down components to scrap yards or smelters. This laundering disrupts traceability of stolen parts to the thieves who stole them, and lack of part identification prevents connecting a part being sold to a particular theft.

These loopholes in policy create an environment absent of criminal risk at the same time as the value of the precious metals the parts contain soar has created a perfect storm for these thefts to continue to grow and related crime rings to develop.

Bill Summary:

This bill seeks reduce and eliminate catalytic converter theft by addressing the multiple challenging facets of the issue. Specifically, this bill:

- Allows law enforcement officers and theft investigators to link stolen catalytic converters to the vehicles from which they were stolen by requiring new vehicles to have a number traceable back to the vehicle’s VIN stamped onto the part.
- Creates a grant program through which certain entities can voluntarily stamp VIN numbers onto the catalytic converts of vehicles already on the road at no cost to vehicle owners.
- Requires all purchasers of used catalytic converters to retain records regarding the seller and the parts purchased.
- Prohibits the purchase of “de-canned” (unassembled) catalytic converters, and those with any identifying marks removed or altered.
- Establishes enforceability of the laws around catalytic converter theft by codifying catalytic converter crimes as a criminal offense with criminal penalties.

Background:

Catalytic converters are car parts used to reduce the potency of toxic emissions from an internal combustion engine and are a component required in compliance with the Clean Air Act. Precious metals, including rhodium, platinum and palladium, are used in the construction of catalytic converters where they act as catalysts, removing many toxic elements from the exhaust gasses as they exit the vehicle. These precious metals are at the core of what motivates thieves to steal catalytic converters.

Due to the platinum, palladium and rhodium in catalytic converters, they can be sold to scrap dealers anywhere from \$20 to \$240. At the highest price point for precious metals, a catalytic converter that came from a diesel vehicle may have garnered a black-market price of around \$640. Replacement of these parts can be very costly for vehicle owners; installing a replacement catalytic converter may cost between \$500 – \$2,300 depending on the type and repair costs are often driven higher yet as the fast-working thieves often damage other areas of the car in their attempt to remove the part as quickly as possible. In some cases, the cost of a catalytic converter theft may even be enough to total a vehicle.

Endorsements: