



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ON BEHALF OF:

Morris County Sheriff's Office

Morris County Prosecutor's Office

Morris County Police Chiefs' Association

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**LAW ENFORCEMENT ASKS FOR THE PUBLIC'S HELP TO COMBAT CAR THEFT AND
CAR BURGLARIES**

An Auto Theft Task Force has been created to stop a persistent trend in car thefts and car burglaries in Morris County, as experienced by other counties in northern New Jersey.

Vehicle owners, too, can reduce the thefts and protect their property by following a few simple steps.

In a recent three-day period alone in Morris County, six vehicles were stolen – in Madison, Mountain Lakes, Montville, Mount Olive and Roxbury – including two that were taken in afternoon daylight.

In 2019 in Morris County, 215 vehicles were stolen and another 233 vehicles were burglarized.

In 2018, 227 vehicles were stolen in Morris County and another 231 vehicles were burglarized, with valuables removed, but the vehicles were not removed from the premises.

In the majority of these cases, stolen vehicles have been left unlocked by the owner with a key fob left in the car allowing a thief to immediately drive it away.

Alarmingly, in some incidents in Morris County, suspects have entered victims' homes by using garage door openers found in unlocked vehicles. Once inside the homes, thieves have been able to locate key fobs and steal cars.

Unlocked vehicles that do not have a key fob inside are also being searched for valuables. In some cases, car burglars have resorted to smashing windows of vehicles parked at gyms, parks, and day care centers and grabbing purses, wallets and other valuables left inside. Bank and credit cards stolen from inside these vehicles are being used in multiple locations, compromising victims' finances.

Of critical concern to law enforcement is that some vehicles stolen in Morris County have been used to commit violent crimes in other areas, such as shootings, armed robberies and homicide. One incident involved a vehicle stolen from Parsippany that was used in a shooting involving three firearms in Essex County.

High-end makes and models – Mercedes Benz, Lexus, Range Rover, Porsche, Audi and Ford pick-up trucks – are most commonly targeted. But when they are locked, and no key fob is available, other models are targeted.

Communities targeted by thieves are generally close to highways, including Routes 80, 287, 46 and 24. Most of the vehicles have been recovered – 75 percent – but typically are damaged. The stolen vehicles have predominantly been disposed of in Essex County.

Community members are asked to be the first line of defense in preventing car thefts and car burglaries. Law enforcement asks you to take simple, proactive steps

to discourage thieves who roam residential neighborhoods in the dark of night, checking parked vehicles on streets and in driveways to determine whether they are locked.

- Vehicles should never be left unlocked.
- Never leave a key fob in a vehicle.
- Neighbors should watch out for neighbors. Call your neighbor if you see that their car is unlocked or valuables are visible inside the vehicle.
- Report any suspicious activity or person.
- Call 911 to report crimes in progress.

To further combat this and other issues affecting our community, a multi-agency auto theft/anti-crime task force has been launched to enhance patrols and further investigations of auto theft and other pattern-type crimes. This initiative, first conceptualized by Chief Andrew Caggiano of the Montville Police Department, has come about through a partnership between the Morris County Sheriff's Office, the Morris County Police Chiefs' Association, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and the New Jersey State Police Auto Theft Task Force, in coordination with various law enforcement agencies.

"This vital task force will help us identify thieves and stop a stream of offenders from entering Morris County to steal from people when they're asleep, visiting a gym or store, or when they are out of their home at work. The task force will enable us to conduct immediate investigations, across county lines, in an effort to locate vehicles and hold suspects accountable more quickly," Morris County Sheriff James M. Gannon said.

Montville Township Police Chief Andrew Caggiano said of his call for an Auto Theft Task Force: "In Montville, we are a geographically and economically convenient location. As such, we are experiencing a scourge of vehicle thefts and burglaries. I realized that there is strength in the combining of our forces, and proposed the Auto Theft Task Force."

Morris County Prosecutor Fredric M. Knapp lauded this initiative, saying, "Chief Caggiano has taken the lead on this effort. However, we need our residents to be vigilant to prevent these crimes."

Chester Police Chief Thomas Williver, who serves as President of the Morris County Police Chiefs' Association, said: "We find that by joining agencies and supplying personnel to a task force, we can create a situation of force multiplication. We support Chief Caggiano and all of the Morris County Chiefs whose jurisdictions are affected by this dangerous crime spree. This is intelligence-led policing and will help all of our communities."

The Newark Police Department also is a partner in the task force, and in February 2020 started its own 90-day pilot program called the Felony Auto Theft Investigative Unit. According to Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose, Newark police as of February 2020 recovered 120 vehicles stolen from other municipalities, with 41 of them, or 34 percent, involved in violent crimes.

Law enforcement is also tapping into technology to communicate with neighborhoods where car thefts or burglaries occur and ask residents to check for surveillance footage that may prove helpful in identifying suspects and other vehicles that may have been involved. Several apps that use home Wi-Fi to alert homeowners to the presence of someone at their door or within range of a security camera can provide a high-density video stream of activity on the exterior of their property.

The critical aspect of this initiative is to partner with members of the community, who are asked to be alert and provide information to law enforcement so that they can target suspects committing crimes in the county. "If you see something, say something." Not just near your home but anywhere you observe something suspicious.

The Morris County Auto Theft Task Force can be contacted at 973-285-6300 or after hours at 973-285-2900.

Press inquiries may be made to Peggy Wright, Public Information Officer, Morris County Sheriff's Office. 973-285-6654