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# Automobile Theft Prevention Program

2019-2020

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## Report to the Governor and Minnesota Legislature

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## Minnesota Department of Commerce Mission

The Minnesota Department of Commerce mission is to protect all Minnesotans in their everyday financial transactions by investigating and evaluating services, and advocating that they be fair, accessible and affordable. Wherever you are in Minnesota, the Department of Commerce is with you every day. Whether you're filling up on gas, purchasing a home, working to reduce energy consumption or rebuilding after a disaster—we are with you, no matter what. The Minnesota Department of Commerce oversees more than 20 regulated industries, ensuring that Minnesota businesses are strong and Minnesota consumers are protected. Learn more at [mn.gov/commerce](https://mn.gov/commerce).

## Program background

The Automobile Theft Prevention Program was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1996. The program is authorized under Minnesota Statute, section 65B.84.

The program is funded by a surcharge collected from automobile insurance carriers that provide comprehensive insurance coverage issued in the State of Minnesota. The amount of the surcharge collected for the Auto Theft Prevention Program is \$.50 per vehicle having comprehensive coverage for every six months of coverage. The program utilizes this funding for a competitive grant process for activities that address automobile theft in the State of Minnesota.

In July of 2004, the Automobile Theft Prevention Program was statutorily transferred to the Minnesota Department of Commerce. The Department's Commerce Fraud Bureau (CFB) has managed the program since 2009. The CFB is a statutorily authorized law enforcement agency within the Minnesota Department of Commerce charged with conducting criminal investigations involving insurance fraud and related crimes.

During the 2017 legislative session the scope of the program was expanded to include automobile-related theft crimes.

In April of 2020 the Department assigned a Special Agent from the Commerce Fraud Bureau to act as the State's Automobile Theft Grant Prevention Coordinator.

## Program mission

To develop, sponsor and coordinate the implementation of statewide plans, programs and strategies to combat automobile theft on a statewide basis.

To improve the administration of the automobile theft laws.

To provide a forum for identification of critical problems for those persons dealing with automobile theft.

To audit the plans and programs funded in whole or in part by the Auto Theft Prevention Program and evaluate the effectiveness of such programs.

To assess the scope of auto theft, analyze various method of combating auto theft, and develop a plan to combat auto theft, including estimates of funds required and distributing money.

*Source: Minn. Stat. §65B.84 Subd. 1*

## Scope of this report

The information in this report is presented as mandated by Minnesota Statute, 65B.84, Subd. 2, to report the activities and expenditures of the Automobile Theft Prevention Program.

This report presents a review of the Auto Theft Prevention Grant Program, a review of auto theft in Minnesota, challenges and opportunities confronting Minnesotans and law enforcement seeking to combat auto theft in the state.

The statistical information for reporting automobile thefts primarily comes from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) which are a culmination of statistical information reported to the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) by the variously law enforcement agencies in Minnesota.<sup>1</sup>

Automobile thefts reported in by UCR include only those offenses when auto theft is the most serious offence committed, thus the numbers reported reflect lower than the true number of automobile thefts.<sup>2</sup>

UCR data cited in this report was released September 2020 and has been supplemented with insight, feedback and statistics collected from Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Program grantees.

The new information in this report reflects additional data collected from program grantees. In the fall of 2019, the program changed data requirements of grantees in order to capture a better representation of the number

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<sup>1</sup> For 2019, 388 of the 402 law enforcement agencies in Minnesota provided data UCR data to the BCA.

<sup>2</sup> For example, if a vehicle is stolen as part of a burglary, forgery or robbery (carjacking) those numbers are not reflected in the UCR reports.

of, and impact of, auto theft in Minnesota. By incorporating 2020 insight from program grantees with the 2019 UCR data, this report presents a current and broad view of the scope auto theft and preventions measures across Minnesota.

This report uses additional data sources, cited throughout this report and in footnotes, in order to portray a more accurate picture.

# Auto Theft Prevention Grant Program

For the 2020 – 2021 state budget biennium (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2021) the Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Grant provides funding to support auto theft prevention activities for 35 law enforcement agencies and four prosecutor offices in Minnesota. A total of \$1,686,279 was awarded for fiscal year 2020 and \$1,687,527 for fiscal year 2021.

## Law enforcement grant agencies

Grant funded programs include:

### **Anoka County Joint Law Enforcement Council**

\$124,846 was awarded to the Anoka County Joint Law Enforcement Council which includes all the law enforcement agencies in Anoka County. An analyst is funded on an overtime basis to review and spot auto theft trends in the county. Information gathered is then shared with officers and investigators. In addition, funding provides money to be used for overtime related to auto theft investigations, special auto theft prevention details and training.

### **Bemidji Police Department**

\$125,198 was awarded to the Bemidji Police Department. The funds are used to fund a portion of an investigative position whose duties focus on auto thefts. Funds also include equipment for auto theft investigations.

### **Bloomington Police Department**

\$145,674 was awarded to the Bloomington Police Department. Most of the funds awarded were to finish the installation of license plate reader technology at the Mall of America and to update the department's bait cars. Additional funds were provided for saturation patrols, to recover stolen vehicles, target instances were thieves steal vehicles left running unattended and to educate owners who leave running vehicles unattended.

### **Brooklyn Center Police Department**

\$159,137 was award to the Brooklyn Center Police Department. The funding supports an auto theft investigator position as well as training and maintenance of bait car equipment.

### **Dakota County Sheriff's Office**

\$56,372 was awarded to the Dakota County Sheriff's Office. The funding was provided to purchase equipment and training for a computer program that can retrieve data from an automobiles infotainment system. Additional funding was provided for overtime funds used for processing recovered stolen vehicles with this new technology.

**Duluth Police Department**

\$209,599 was awarded to the Duluth Police Department. The funding was awarded for the creation of a full-time investigative position assigned to auto theft investigations. Funds also include the purchase of equipment for auto theft and theft from auto investigations.

**Hennepin County Sheriff's Office**

\$54,000 was awarded (fiscal year 2021) for the purchase of Automated License Plate Readers that will be assigned to squads working violent crimes and be used countywide in attempts to recover more stolen vehicles.

**Maplewood Police Department**

\$189,867 was awarded to the Maplewood Police Department to fund a full-time auto theft investigator.

**Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office**

\$165,012 was awarded to the Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office. This grantee includes a coverage area in Central Minnesota that includes the following law enforcement agencies: Avon Police, Baxter Police, Benton County Sheriff, Crow Wing County Sheriff, Isanti County Sheriff, Isanti Police, Isle Police, Milaca Police, Millie Lacs County Sheriff, Morrison County Sheriff, Onamia Police, Princeton Police, Sauk Rapids Police, Stearns County Sheriff and St. Cloud Police. The funding supports a part-time auto theft investigator and supports the Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) in these communities.

**Minneapolis Police Department**

\$415,962 was awarded to the Minneapolis Police department for personnel and equipment to maintain their bait car program.

**Saint Paul Police Department**

\$558,437 was awarded to the Saint Paul Police Department, acting as the lead agency for the East Metro Auto Theft Task Force (Saint Paul, West St. Paul, South St. Paul and Maplewood). The funding provided for a full-time auto theft investigator, full-time auto theft analyst, overtime for auto theft investigations, Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) equipment and additional equipment and training to support the program.

**South St. Paul Police Department**

\$24,860 was awarded to the South St. Paul Police Department. The funding was dedicated to training officers on evidence processing and the purchase of an additional Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR).

## Grant supported equipment

### Automated License Plate Readers

Six grantees used Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) purchased or supported under the grant. From the period of July 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020 the agencies averaged the use of 43 mobile license plate reader systems and 41 stationary systems. Those systems accounted for the recovery of 458 stolen vehicles worth \$2,891,020 and resulted in the arrests of 134 offenders.

### Bait cars

Five grantees used bait cars in their auto theft prevention efforts. From July 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020 bait cars were deployed for 1140 days.<sup>3</sup> The bait cars were stolen on 45 occasions resulting in 45 arrests.



#### What is a bait car?

A bait car is what it implies, it is bait set out by law enforcement to try and catch thieves. Sometimes it may be called a decoy or a trap car. It involves a popular motor vehicle which can be remotely monitored by law enforcement via modern surveillance technology including GPS systems. The photo shown here is a bait car used by a Minnesota local law enforcement agency, not named here for purposes of future investigations. Once someone drives off in the bait car, law enforcement tracks the vehicle and the thief. Bait car

technology allows law enforcement the ability to shut down the car's motor remotely, many lock the doors and windows to prevent the occupants from exiting the vehicle until officers arrive on the scene to make an arrest.

Bait cars are an effective tool, in part, because they eliminate the ability of the suspect to claim they borrowed the car from someone and did not realize it was stolen. Communities that use bait cars advertise their use in hopes it will cause a potential auto theft to think twice. Bait cars can look like any other car and there is nothing distinctive about them. Unfortunately, some do not think twice and steal the car anyway.

## Law enforcement grant agency efforts and activities

For the time period of October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020 the 35 law enforcement agencies participating in the automobile theft prevention grant reported 8,533 stolen automobiles valued at \$57,880,034.

7,950 (93%) of the reported stolen vehicles were recovered.

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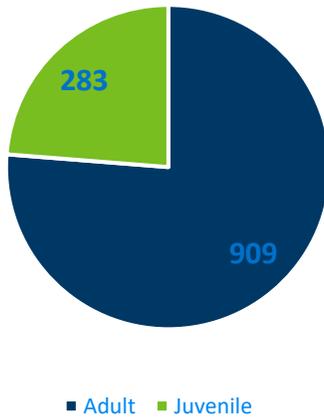
<sup>3</sup> Each day represents one bait car deployment, thus if three cars were deployed on one day it is counted as three days.

Of the 8,533 vehicles stolen, 583 (7%) had not yet been recovered.

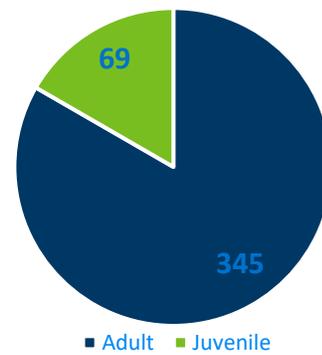
### Enforcement activities

From October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020, the grant funded agencies made the following arrests:

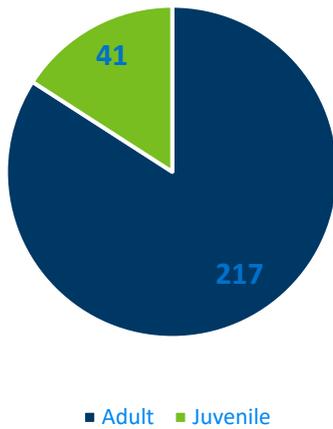
#### Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle



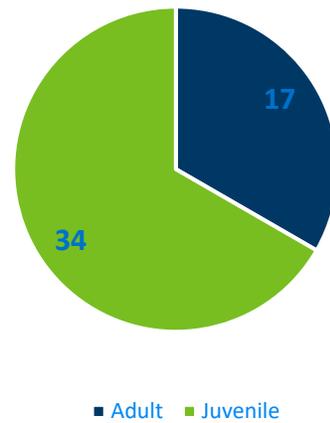
#### All Other Arrests from Grant Activity



#### Motor Vehicle Theft Permanent



#### Carjacking



## **Prosecution grant agencies**

### **Anoka County and Washington County Attorneys' Offices**

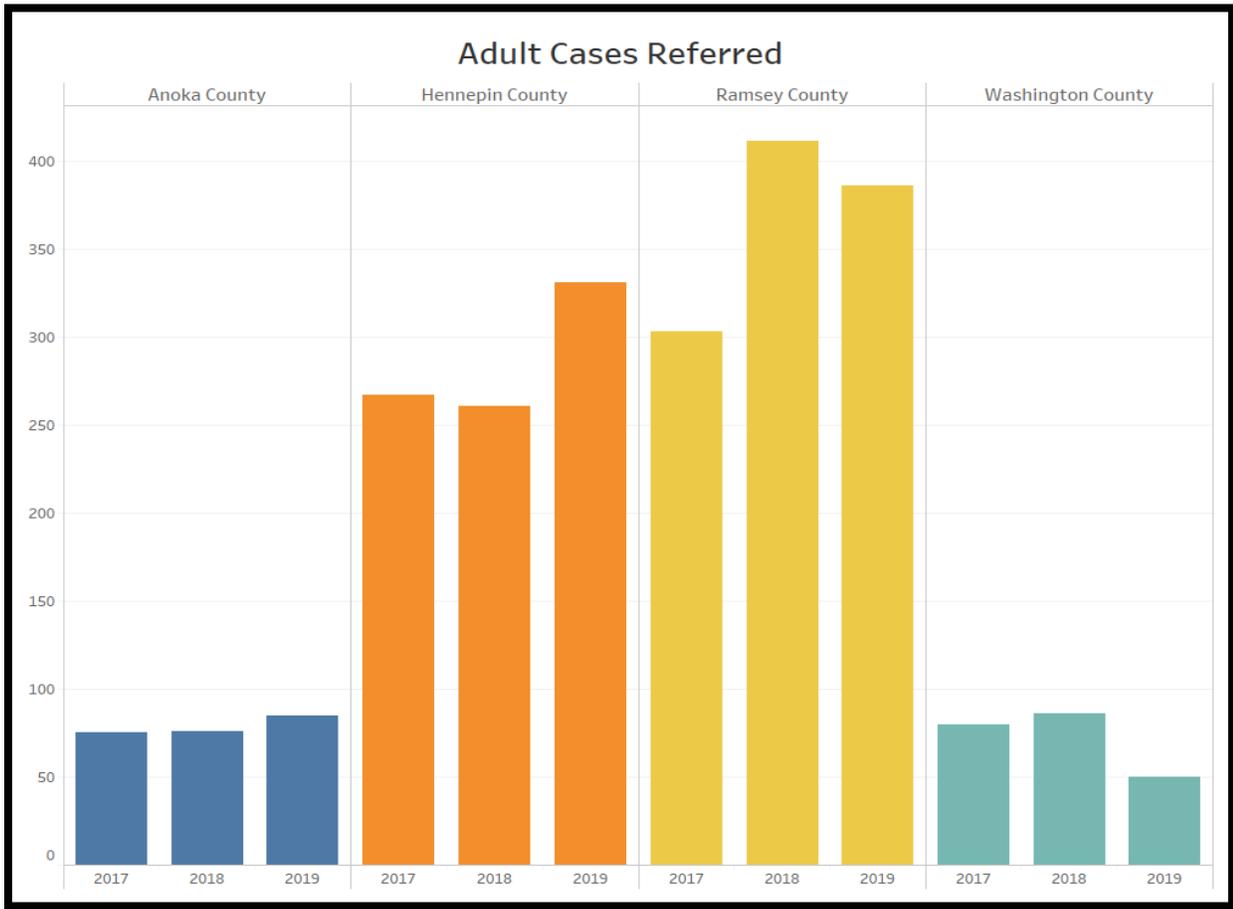
\$104,332 was awarded to support a half time prosecutor in Washington County and quarter time prosecutor in Anoka County. Both prosecutors practice vertical prosecution of auto theft cases where the defendant is an adult. In addition, \$1,500 was awarded for community outreach activities.

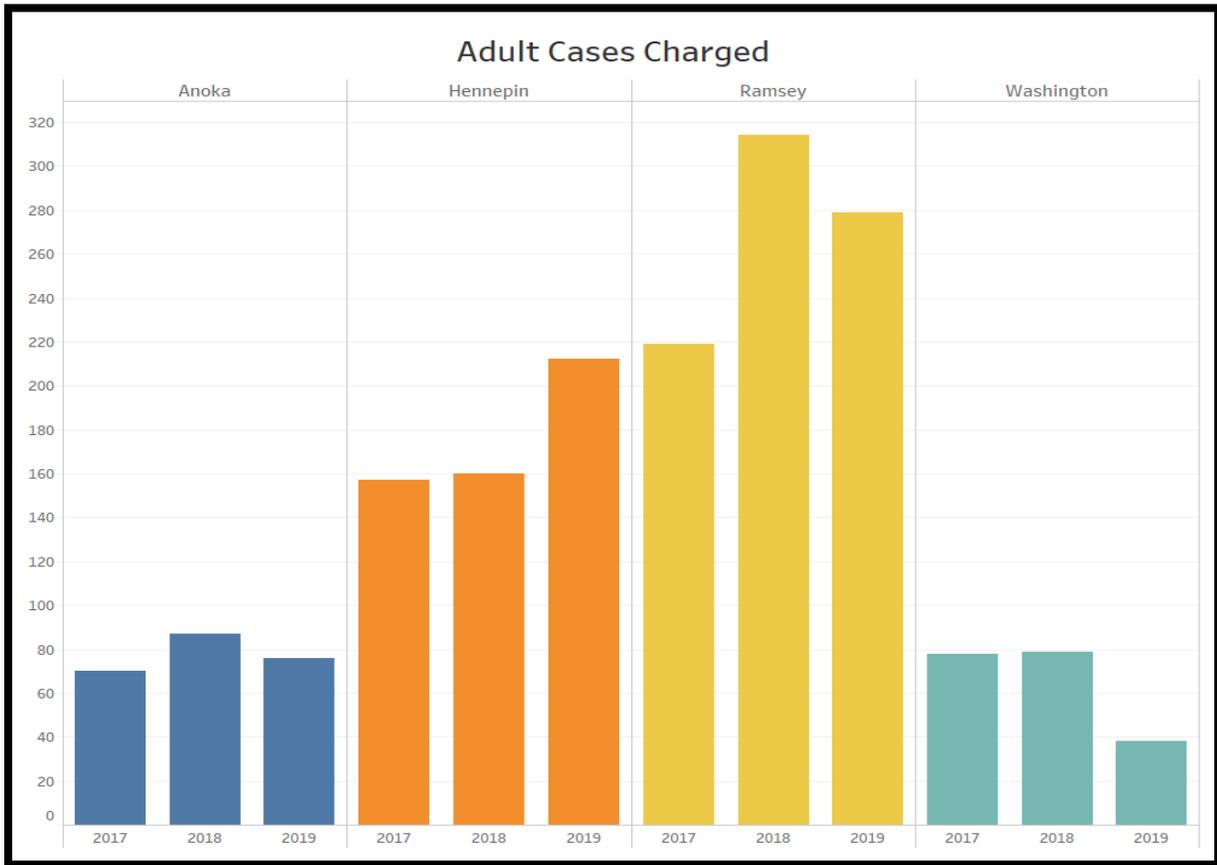
### **Hennepin County Attorney's Office**

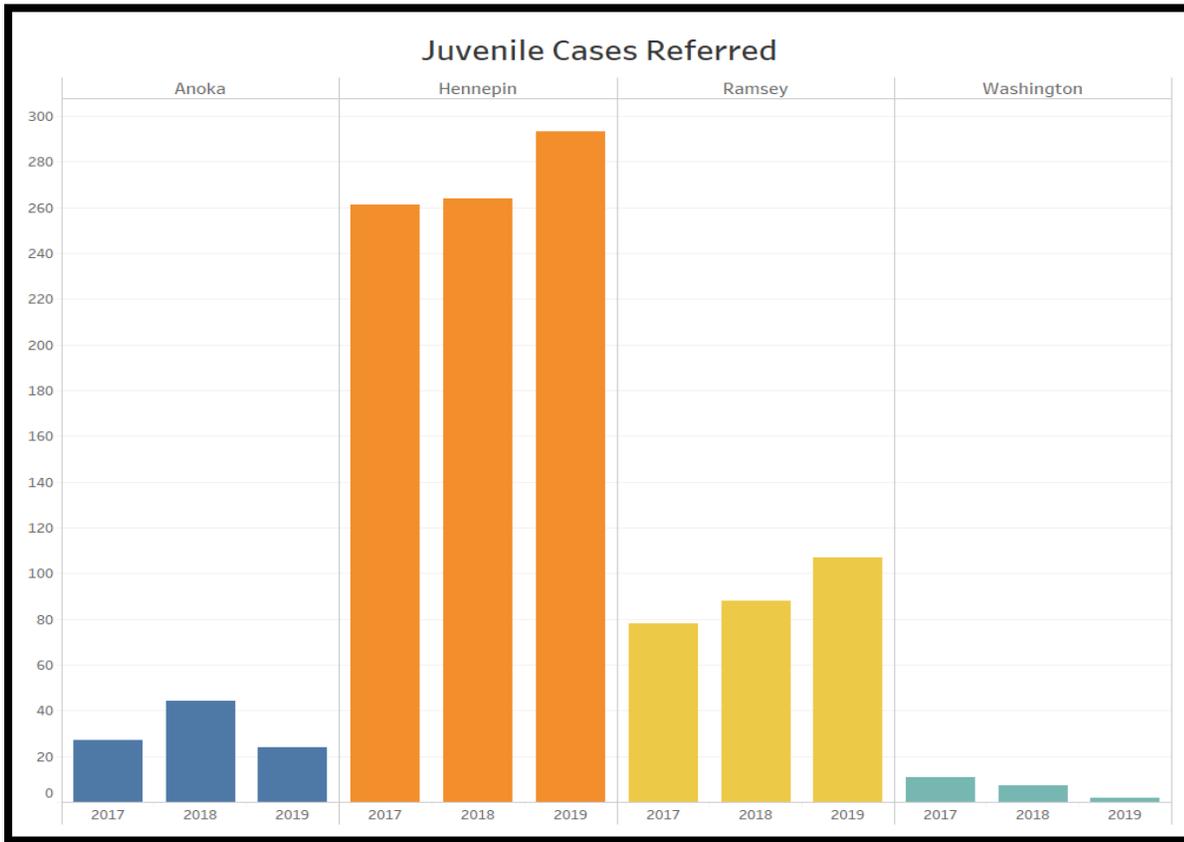
\$663,099 was awarded to the Hennepin County Attorney's Office to support the prosecution of both adult and juvenile auto theft offenders. The funds awarded support a full-time adult prosecutor, half-time juvenile prosecutor, half-time paralegal for adult cases and three-quarter time paralegal for juvenile cases. Due to the high volume of auto thefts in Hennepin County, the adult prosecutor only prosecutes those auto theft cases where auto theft is the most serious offense and generally does not prosecute offenses such as carjacking or burglaries when an automobile is taken. Due to the volume of cases and manner in which juvenile cases are handled in the courts, auto theft cases are handled by multiple attorneys in the juvenile division. One attorney has the primary responsibility for auto theft cases and prosecutes those cases where auto theft is the only offense an offender has. In addition, that attorney participates in auto theft related meetings, trainings and is a resource to other prosecutors for auto theft related issues.

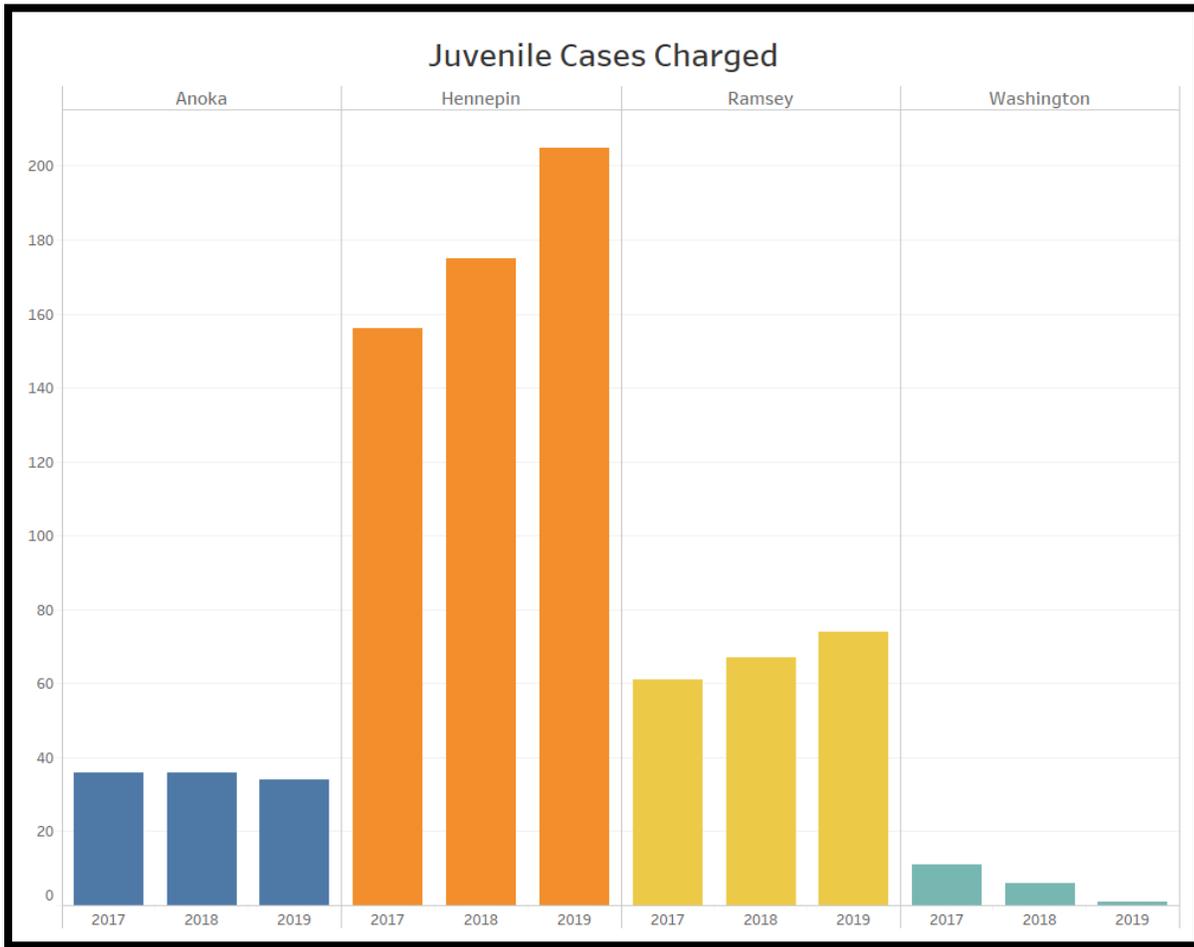
### **Ramsey County Attorney's Office**

\$540,194 was awarded to the Ramsey County Attorney's Office to support the prosecution of adult and juvenile auto theft offenders. All of the adult auto theft cases are reviewed by one attorney. That attorney follows a vertical prosecution model and follows the case from charging through trial. Juvenile cases are handled by multiple attorneys in the juvenile division. One attorney has the primary responsibility for auto theft cases and prosecutes those cases where auto theft is the only offense an offender has and serves as a point of contact for juvenile auto theft issues.









## Trials

None of the prosecuting authorities had an automobile theft case go to trial from October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.

## Adult dispositions (For the period of October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.)

County	Executed Prison Sentence	Felony Probationary Sentence	Non-Felony Probationary Sentence	Diversion	Dismissed (Plea Agreement)	Dismissed (Other)
Anoka	5	26	5	0	0	0
Hennepin	8	28	2	14	23	4
Ramsey	37	93	0	6	64	17
Washington	15	28	5	0	0	0

## Juvenile dispositions

Juvenile dispositions have been drastically reduced due to continuances in the court system due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics are not available at this time.

## Restitution

This past year prosecutors have been asked to report on the amounts of restitution ordered by the courts. For the period of October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020 they have reported the following:

County	Adult Restitution	Juvenile Restitution
Anoka	\$11,868.37	\$7,000.15
Hennepin	\$17,890.00	\$19,961.22
Ramsey	\$9,440.23	\$0
Washington	\$38,946.00	\$0

# Automobile theft in Minnesota

## Economic and societal impact

The economic impact of automobile theft is substantial. The costs paid by insurance companies related to the claim's administration, repair or replacement, towing and rental costs are passed along to all consumers in higher premiums.

In addition to the costs covered by insurers, there are substantial additional economic costs. About 22% of vehicles in Minnesota do not have comprehensive insurance coverage. Furthermore, given the median value of a stolen vehicle is relatively low (the average dollar loss per stolen vehicle in 2019 was \$8,886 according to the FBI), it appears a much higher percentage of vehicles stolen do not have insurance coverage for theft.

Automobile thefts disproportionately affect low income and minority communities. In addition to the loss of the vehicle, victims in low income communities frequently do not have money to rent or immediately replace a vehicle. The lack of a vehicle can lead to other costs such as the loss of employment or inability to get children to school due to a lack of transportation. Although most stolen motor vehicles are recovered, agencies report more than half are significantly damaged. Police report that it is not uncommon for people whose car is stolen, to not have enough money to repair it once it is recovered. Further, if the vehicle is still in drivable condition, it is not uncommon for the vehicle to be stolen again, because the ignition was not repaired upon return to the owner.

Even if someone does not live in an area with a high incidence of vehicle theft, it can still affect them. One-third (33%) of the vehicles stolen in the city of Minneapolis belong to people who are not residents. In addition, many of the automobiles stolen are used to commit other offenses, often violent crimes. Stolen vehicles are involved in a disproportionate number of motor vehicle crashes. It is estimated that a stolen vehicle is more than 40 times more likely to be involved in a crash. These incidents cause damage not only to the stolen vehicle, but also other vehicles, property, and often cause personal injuries, sometimes with deadly consequences.

## Minnesota auto theft trends, national comparison

There were an estimated 721,885 thefts of motor vehicles nationwide in 2019 according to the FBI. Vehicle thefts have been trending downward nationally since they peaked at 1.7 million in 1991.

More than \$6 billion was lost nationwide to motor vehicle thefts in 2019. The average dollar loss per stolen vehicle was \$8,886.

Nationwide, automobile theft decreased 4% in 2019.<sup>4</sup>

In Minnesota, automobile theft increased 13% in 2019.

According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)<sup>5</sup> there were 11,410 motor vehicle thefts reported in in Minnesota in 2019, compared to 10,082 in 2018.

From 2018 to 2019, 34 states saw a reduction in the number of automobile thefts whereas 16 showed an increase.

At a 10% per capita increase, Minnesota has the 5th highest per capita increase in the nation.

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<sup>4</sup> FBI UCR 2019 Report Crime in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> The UCR only reports the highest-level offense, thus if a motor vehicle is taken by burglary, the theft of the vehicle is not included in the UCR.

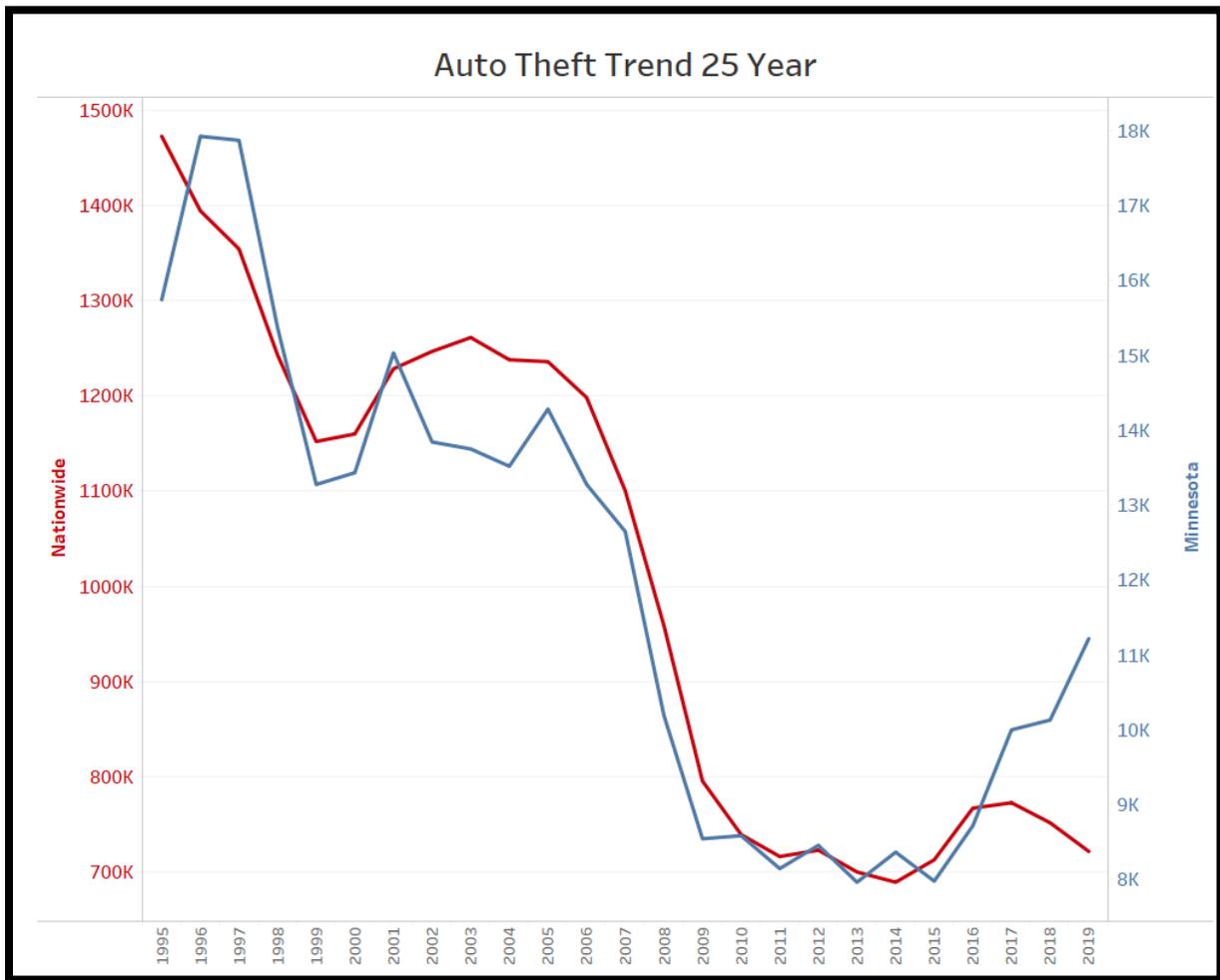


Figure 1

As illustrated in Figure 1, when looking at the past 25 years of data, Minnesota data generally followed the overall national trend until 2016. In 2017 the national rate increased slightly and has trended downward in 2018 and 2019. Since 2016, Minnesota data has shown a sharp upward trend.

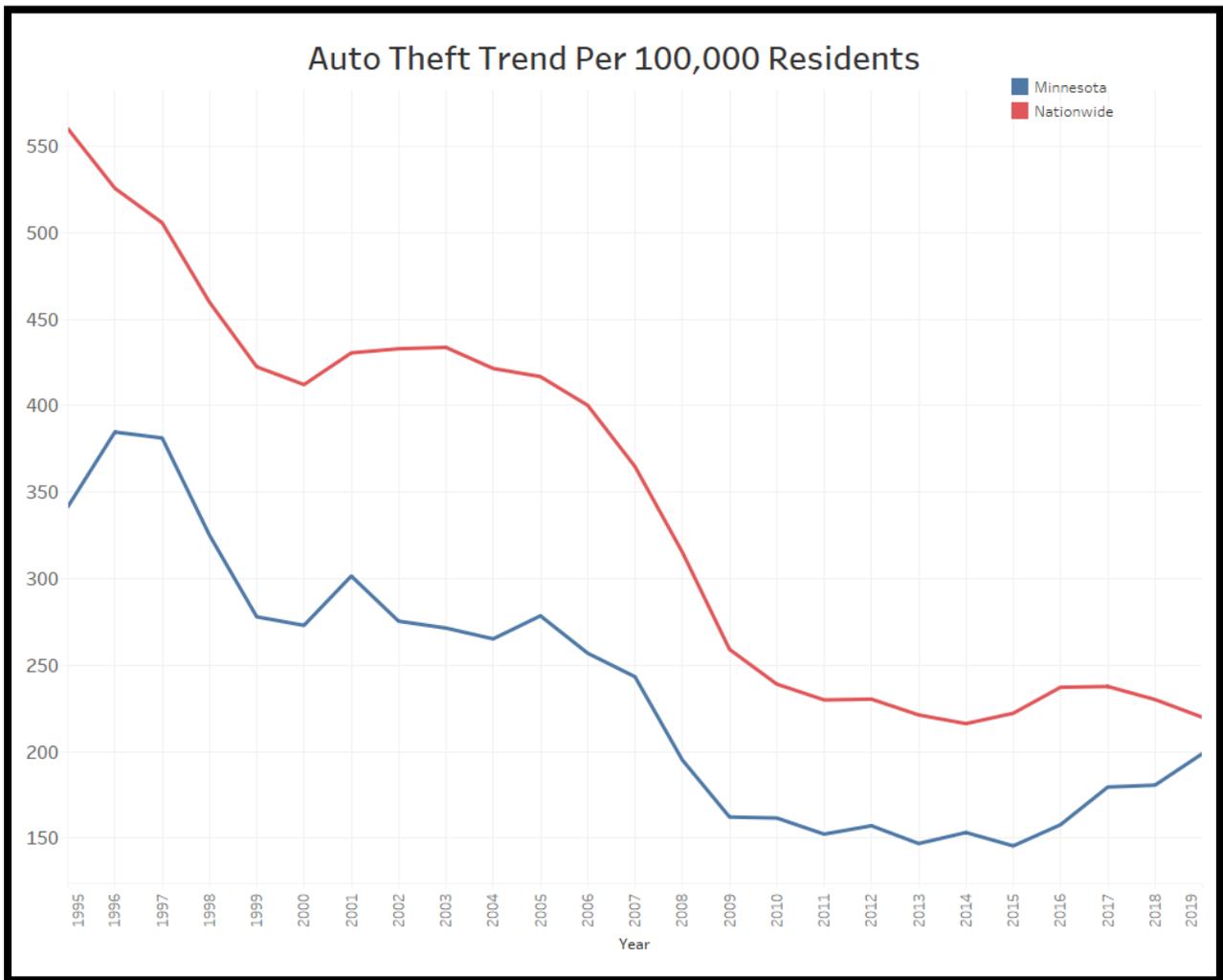


Figure 2

As illustrated in Figure 2, the automobile theft per capita rate per 100,000 residents for Minnesota increased from 180 in 2018 to 199 in 2019, whereas the national average decreased from 230 to 220.

## Minnesota auto theft trends, regional comparison

Figures 3 and 4 compare Minnesota auto theft data to regional neighboring states.

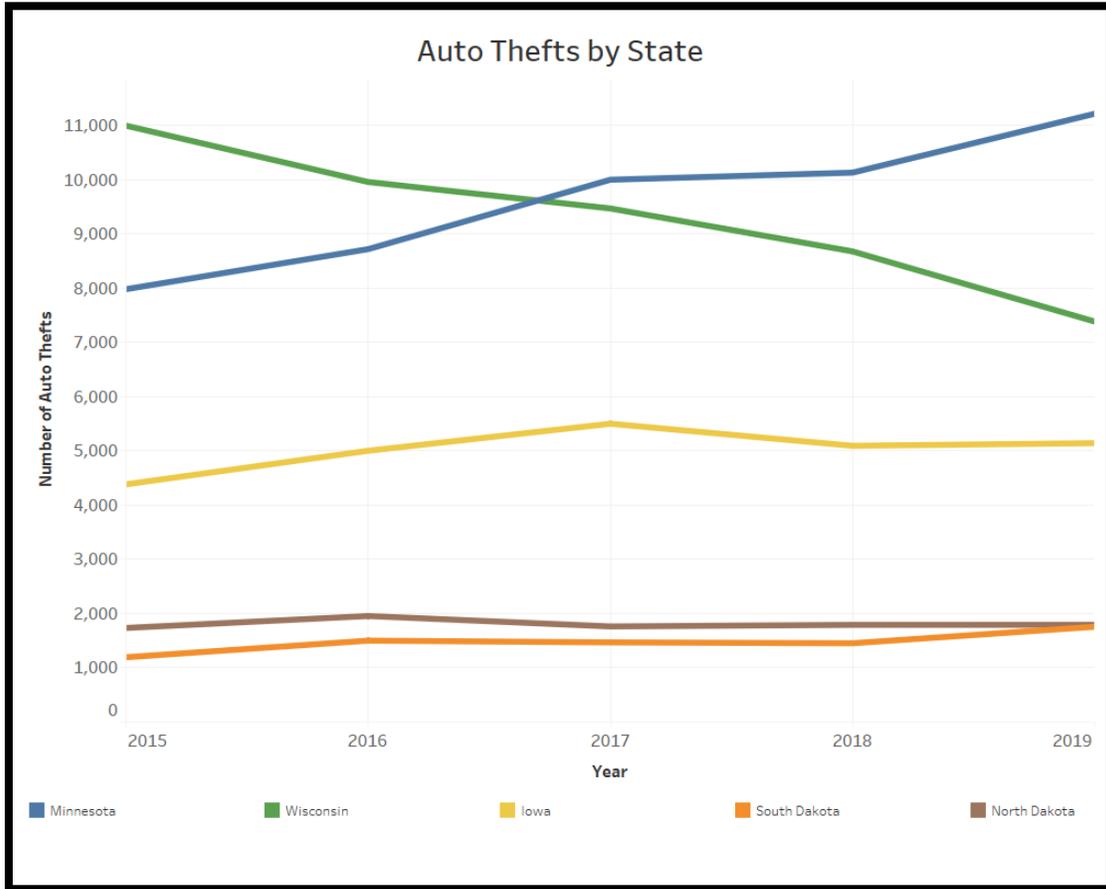


Figure 3

As illustrated in Figure 3, Wisconsin has shown dramatic reductions in the number and rate of automobile thefts over the past 5 years, the number of automobile thefts in Iowa, South Dakota and North Dakota have remained relatively stable and Minnesota's auto thefts have increased since 2015.

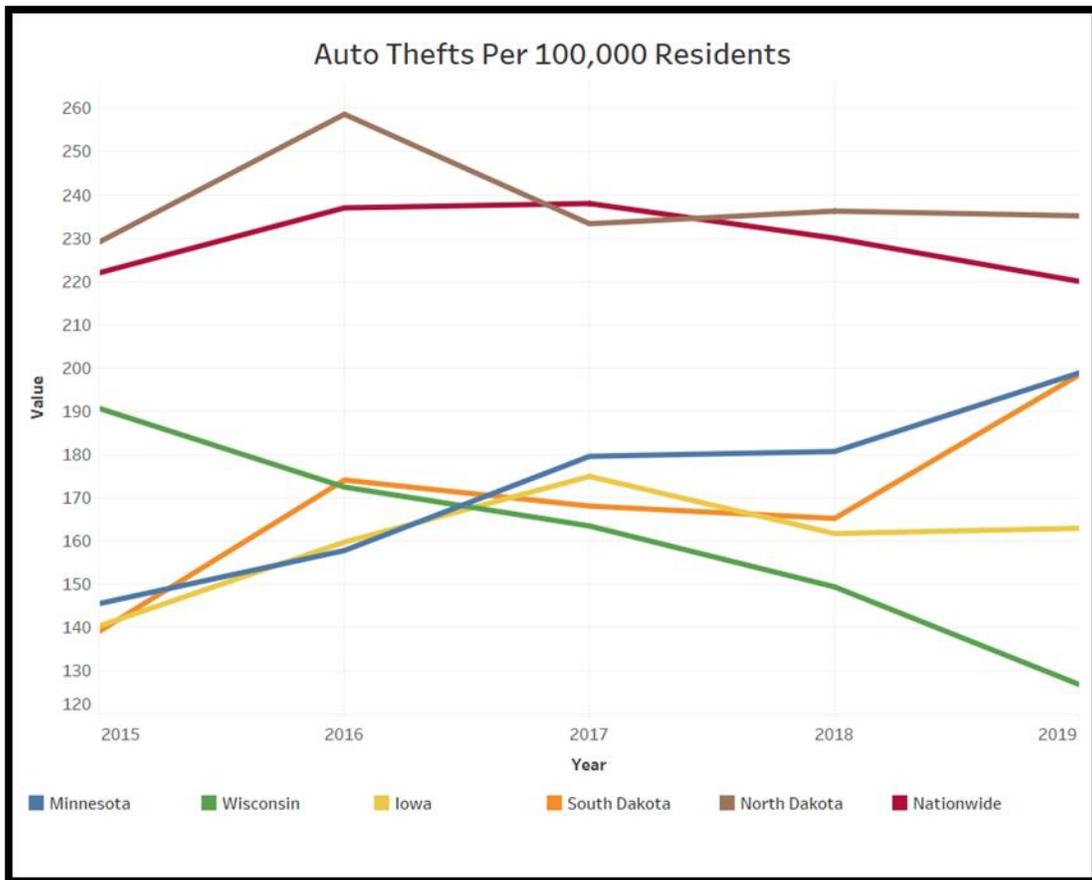


Figure 4

As illustrated in Figure 4, Minnesota’s per capita auto thefts have increased since 2015. South Dakota’s per capita auto theft rate increased in 2019. Iowa remained stable in 2019 and has seen an increase since 2015. North Dakota has remained relatively stable since 2015. Wisconsin reports significant reductions in automobile thefts annually since 2015.

## Statewide analysis

Auto theft occurrences and rates vary widely across the state, ranging from no reported automobile thefts in six counties to more than 4,000 auto thefts in the state's most populated county.

Automobile thefts disproportionately impact the 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area, and especially so, in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Although the 7-county metro area accounts for approximately 55% of the population, the Twin Cities area counties accounts for 77% of the automobile thefts in Minnesota.

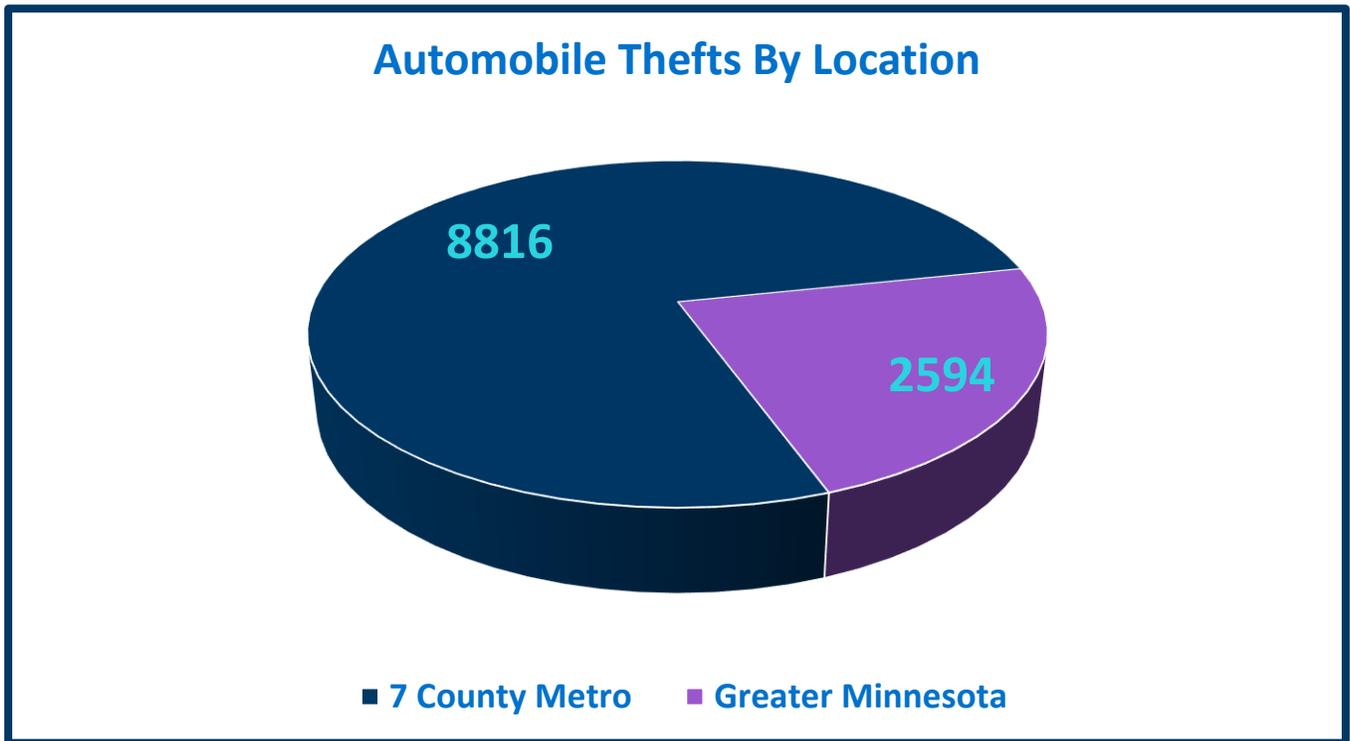


Figure 5

The following local law enforcement agencies had more than 100 automobile thefts in 2019.

<b>Law Enforcement Agency</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Auto Thefts</b>	<b>Rate/100,000</b>
Minneapolis Police*	Hennepin	3011	699
Saint Paul Police*	Ramsey	2419	839
Brooklyn Park Police	Hennepin	301	424
Duluth Police*	St. Louis	212	247
Brooklyn Center Police*	Hennepin	202	661
St. Cloud Police*	Stearns	175	256
Ramsey County Sheriff's Office	Ramsey	169	199
Bloomington Police*	Hennepin	165	192
Maplewood Police*	Ramsey	163	394
Rochester Police	Olmsted	130	110
Roseville Police	Ramsey	117	329
Burnsville Police	Dakota	112	183
Anoka County Sheriff's Office*	Anoka	108	127
Blaine Police*	Anoka	103	155

\*Recipient of grant funds from the Auto Theft Prevention Grant Fiscal Year 2020 – 2021

## Twin Cities area auto thefts

- Hennepin County accounts for 22% of the state’s population and 39% of Minnesota’s automobile thefts (4,396).
- Six Hennepin County cities had automobile theft rates per 100,000 that were greater than the Minnesota average: Minneapolis 698, Brooklyn Center 661, Brooklyn Park 424, Robbinsdale 288, Richfield 249 and New Hope 231.
- The City of Minneapolis accounts for 8% of the state’s population and 26% of Minnesota’s automobile thefts (3,011).

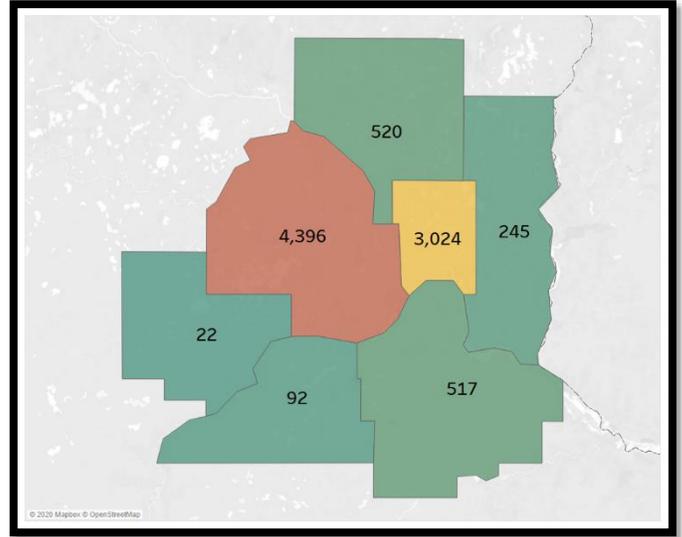


Figure 6: 7-county metro area auto thefts

- Ramsey County accounts for 9% of the state’s population and 28% of Minnesota’s automobile thefts (3,024).
- Five Ramsey County cities had automobile theft rates per 100,000 that were greater than the Minnesota average: Saint Paul 839, Maplewood 394, Roseville 329, North St. Paul 293 and Lauderdale 235.
- The City of Saint Paul accounts for 5% of the state’s population and 23% of Minnesota’s automobile thefts (2,604).

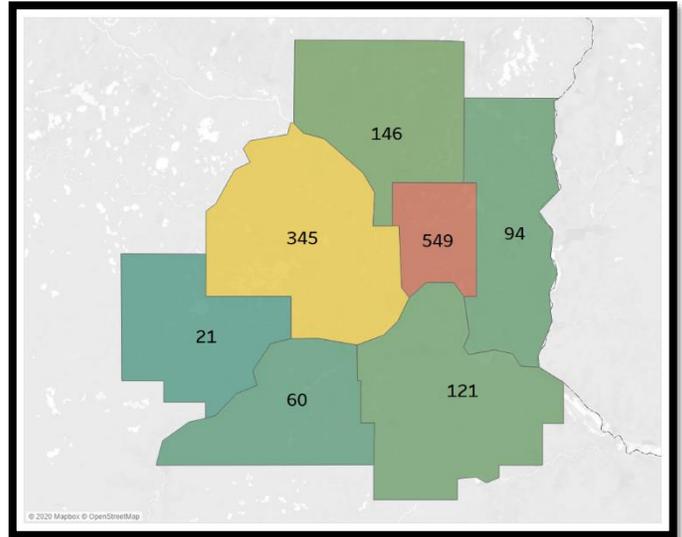
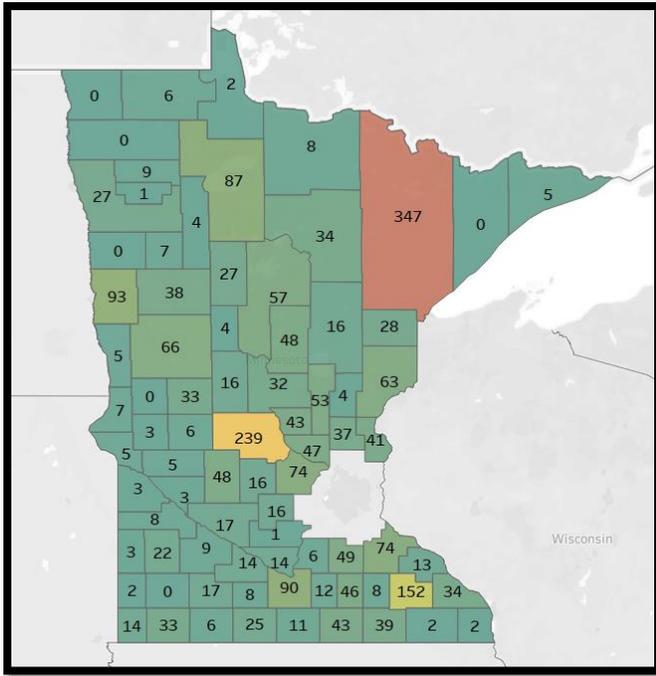


Figure 7: 7-county metro area auto thefts per 100,000

## Greater Minnesota auto thefts



The largest clusters of vehicle thefts in Greater Minnesota are in Duluth with 216 automobile thefts, the St. Cloud/Waite Park area with 201 and Bemidji with 57. These areas have annual per capita auto theft rate greater than 25% higher than the state average.

Six counties in Minnesota, all in Greater Minnesota, reported no automobile thefts in 2019.

Figure 9: Greater Minnesota auto thefts

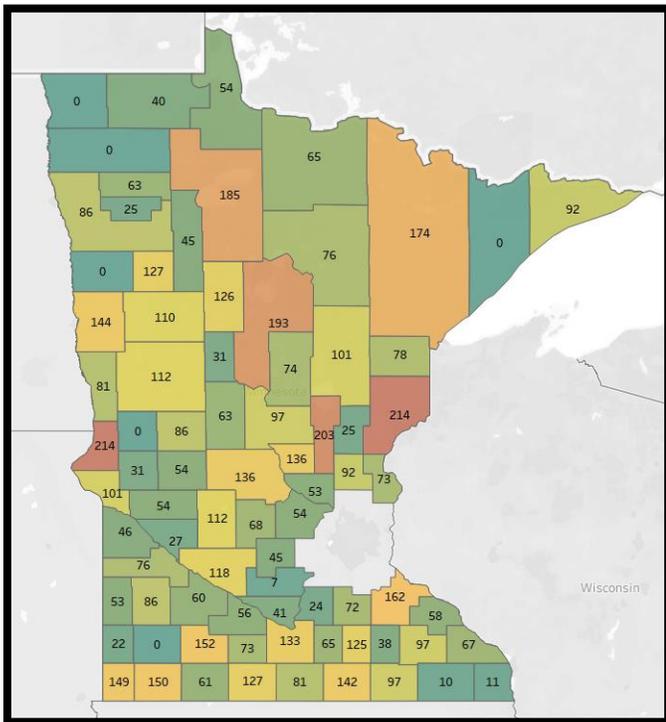


Figure 8: Greater Minnesota auto thefts per 100,000

## Clearance rates

Of 11,410 automobile thefts in 2019, 1,576 were cleared by arrest, which results in a clearance rate of 14%. Motor vehicle theft has the lowest clearance rate of any crime reported on the UCR.

The FBI reports that nationally the clearance rate is 14% for motor vehicle theft<sup>6</sup>.

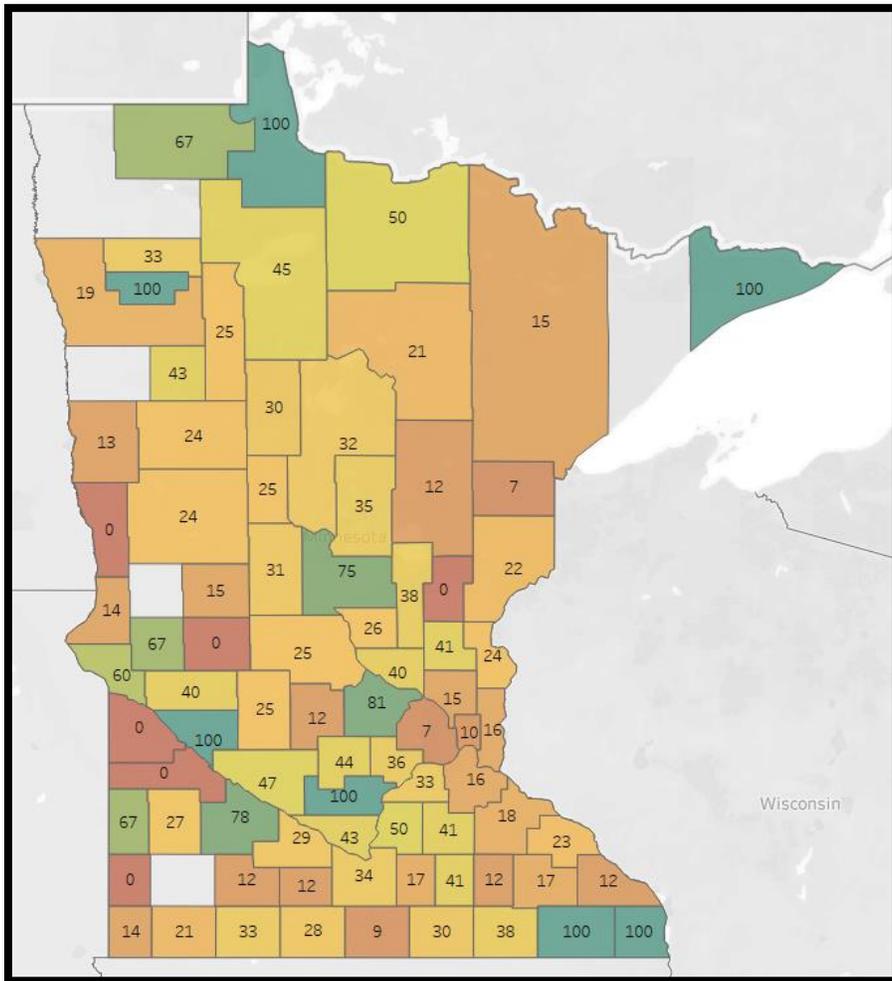


Figure 10: Percentage of auto theft cases cleared. Grey counties had no data to report and no auto thefts in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Source link: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/clearances>

## 2019 top 10 stolen automobiles in Minnesota



1 Honda Civic  
2000 (605)



2 Honda Accord  
1996 (545)



3 Honda CR-V  
2000 (425)



4 Chevrolet Pick-  
up 1999 (376)



5 Toyota Camry  
2009 (363)



6 Ford Pick-up  
2004 (316)



7 Chevrolet  
Impala 2007 (252)



8 Toyota Corolla  
2001 (224)



9 Jeep Cherokee  
2019 (178)



10 Dodge Caravan  
2005 (160)

## Thefts by vehicle type



Passenger Vehicle

89%



Other

8%



Truck and Bus

3%



# Challenges

## **People leaving keys in their cars**

The single most cited complaint by both law enforcement officers and prosecutors are the large number of cases where the vehicle is stolen when the owner left the keys inside the vehicle. Approximately 60% of vehicles stolen in the metro area and as high as 90% in Greater Minnesota, are done with the keys. Not only does this make stealing a vehicle easier, it also makes prosecution more difficult. Although some communities have ordinances which prohibit leaving keys in an unattended vehicle, the ordinances are not consistent, are often unenforced and the public is largely unaware of their existence. The motives of why people leave keys in their cars needs to be better understood in order to address this issue.

## **Permanent automobile thefts**

Permanent automobile thefts have the highest economic impact. Between 10% and 15% of vehicles stolen in Minnesota fall into this category. In addition, about 18% of those arrested for auto theft by program grantees have evidenced intent to keep the vehicle permanently. These cases are difficult to investigate as they often involve several vehicles and suspects, and require specialized knowledge to investigate including an understanding of the motor vehicle titling and registration systems, access to and familiarity with automotive databases, use of technologies and systems designed to protect vehicles and technologies used by criminals to steal them and the ability to identify forged and counterfeit documents.

No single law enforcement agency is charged with investigating these offenses. As a result, many are reluctant to assign investigators to these often complex cases. These investigations are labor intensive and can often take several months or years to investigate. Unfortunately, even when agencies have been provided funding from the Automobile Theft Prevention Grant, they have not followed through investigating these offenses. Other states have solved this problem by giving the responsibility to investigate these cases to a state agency or by establishing statewide or large regional auto theft task forces.

## **Catalytic converter thefts**

Local and international law enforcement has identified an increase in the number of thefts targeting catalytic converters being stolen. The crime takes just minutes and can occur in a home driveway, a parking lot or city street day or night. Catalytic converters are found under a vehicle between the engine and muffler and are designed to act as a line of defense against harmful exhaust system emissions. Thieves target catalytic converters because they are relatively simple to remove and they contain valuable precious metals that can be sold and turned into a handsome profit for a small amount of effort. Generally, there is not an identification number on a catalytic converter, making it hard to trace.

## **Inability to respond to emerging trends**

Although it is predictable that automobile thefts will be higher in communities with higher populations, it is not possible to predict when auto theft sprees will pop up in most communities. It is also not possible to predict when and where new auto theft trends will occur such as the spike in carjacking, theft of catalytic converters or start of an organized auto theft ring. These types of offenses require a swift response and cannot wait for a lengthy grant process to appropriate funding. The current grant structure of the program does not allow for the rapid deployment of grant funds to agencies who wish to combat these crime spikes. Those agencies who have received funding in anticipation of these offenses frequently do not spend the allocated funds, either because the offenses do not occur or when such sprees have been identified they do not have the staff available to assign. Lead agencies forming larger partnerships may better resolve these concerns.

## **Fleeing in a motor vehicle**

During the past year not only have the number of stolen vehicles increased, police report people driving stolen vehicles are more likely to flee and drive recklessly. Many law enforcement agencies no longer pursue stolen vehicles, even when those vehicles have been taken as part of a carjacking. According to law enforcement, although appropriate, these policies may contribute to the increase in automobile thefts and are making recoveries and arrests more difficult.

## **Juvenile auto theft offenders**

While juvenile automobile thefts occur throughout the state, more than half of the juveniles arrested for automobile theft occur in Hennepin and Ramsey County, with two-thirds of those in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The most severe consequences juveniles face for auto theft is a result of other crimes they commit using the stolen vehicle. To date, there has not been local implementation of a successful nor replicable community-based deterrent outside of the justice system.

## **Staffing shortages**

Prosecutors and investigators have reported that working with designated auto theft investigators/prosecutors is more efficient due to having a consistent working relationship and by creating consistent expectations. However, many of the state's law enforcement agencies are having difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel, as a result they are unable to dedicate resources towards auto theft investigations.

## **Lack of analytical tools and data**

As mentioned herein, much of the data collected underrepresents the true scope of automobile theft. Law enforcement agencies do not accurately count automobile thefts when they are committed as part of another crime. The true value of vehicles stolen is not accurately collected. Very few agencies do analytical work to

follow trends and look for patterns involving auto theft. This is even more difficult or impossible to analyze when multiple jurisdictions are involved as is common for auto theft. Furthermore, current computer systems generally do not track the locations of vehicles stolen or recovered. Improved tools and resources will better help law enforcement collect information, share information, detect and respond to emerging trends.

## Opportunities

The opportunities to meet these challenges depend upon the ability to learn, make adjustments, embrace new and innovative techniques, secure increased community support and realize efficiencies in sharing staff, data, analysis and information.

Minnesota statute authorizes the Department to develop and coordinate the implementation of statewide plans, programs and strategies to combat automobile theft on a statewide basis. The Department is focusing more resources on sharing and using the data in this report to guide grantees in combating auto theft crimes.

By reviewing strategies not only employed across Minnesota, but also those deployed nationally and internationally, the Department is able to provide insight and leadership in combating auto theft. As partners with investigators and local law enforcement, with prosecutors and the judicial system, with policy makers and with citizens who can reduce the likelihood of being a victim of auto theft, the Department's coordination role helps facilitate implementation of effective prevention measures.

Improved communication among all levels of law enforcement – and all across the state - is essential to understanding the problem. This includes both program grantee agencies and those not part yet of the program.

Those who see auto theft as only an urban or metro issue are underestimating the impact this crime has on individuals from Ada to Zumbrota, and all the cities and counties in between. The Department has taken steps to ensure wider participation and a broader scope of grant applicants.

By increasing awareness of this grant program and the Department's role in coordination, or as a hub of information, more agencies and jurisdictions will have an opportunity to apply for grant funding, learn from grantees and explore locally relevant options for their community.

The Department is further increasing awareness of, and access to, resources that share best practices and provide a forum for identification of challenges like those noted above for those dealing with automobile theft.

Law enforcement agencies with the greatest increases in auto thefts lack enough, dedicated personnel to investigate these offenses. More focus and innovative ideas, tools and strategies are needed to change the alarming and increasing trend of automobile thefts.

Grant amounts, expenditure categories and grantees in law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies are listed above. This report is an account of what the grant funds were spent on, and not a comprehensive review of previous grant effectiveness. For these reasons, the Department is further enhancing its oversight of Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Grant program.

The 2021-2022 Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Grant cycle provides an opportunity to adjust to both longstanding challenges and emerging trends in auto theft. The Department is revising program expectations, both for the Department and of grant applicants. The Department has already made staffing changes that will result in more strenuous assessing of grant applications and effectiveness.

Additionally, the impact of auto theft crime on the victims is ripe for additional study and understanding. While economic impact is addressed somewhat above, the ramifications of loss of mobility negatively impacts both economic and personal security. Opportunities may exist to explore potential impacts of changes in personal behavior with regard to leaving a vehicle running unoccupied and perhaps other public safety measures that make an individual or community less vulnerable to auto theft crime.

The Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Program has resulted in increased coordination among a wide array of jurisdictions, agencies and individuals seeking effective ways to reduce the havoc caused across Minnesota by these crimes.

## Learn more about the Commerce Fraud Bureau

The Commerce Fraud Bureau is a law enforcement agency within the Minnesota Department of Commerce charged with conducting criminal investigations involving insurance fraud and related crimes.

[Criminal complaints and indictments stemming from CFB investigations](#) are posted online. A criminal complaint is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

## Commerce is here to help

If you have a question or concern about a possible scam or fraud scheme, contact the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Consumer Services Center at [consumer.protection@state.mn.us](mailto:consumer.protection@state.mn.us), 651-239-1600 or 800-657-3602.

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