

Progress and Achievement

Overview and Analysis 1994-2005

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.

The Council and Fund was initially established under Article 41 of the Annotated Code as a Unit within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services with a "Sunset Provision" of 7/1/97. Because of positive results this sunset date was extended by the 1997 General Assembly until July 1, 2000 and the Council transferred to the Department of State Police (Public Safety Article, Section 2-701.) In April 2000, the General Assembly extended the Sunset Provision to July 1, 2003. This Bill was signed into law by Governor Glendening on 5/11/2000. However, during the 2001 Legislative Session, a \$2,000,000 funding provision was deleted from the statute. The funding was restored and the Sunset Provision eliminated in 2002.

Consistent with enabling legislation the Council has developed and implemented a Plan of Operation and a statewide vehicle theft prevention strategy that encompasses public awareness/prevention/education, juvenile intervention, law enforcement, and prosecution.

Since its inception, the Council has awarded over twenty 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.

A statewide public awareness campaign has resulted in more than 110,000 vehicle theft prevention radio and television public service announcements being broadcast by approximately 124 radio and eight television stations. A 1998 statewide telephone survey (Mason/Dixon) indicated that 72% of citizens surveyed were exposed to the campaign and 30% of the respondents indicated that they took action to prevent vehicle theft as a result of the exposure.

In 1997 the Council successfully organized the Maryland Anti-Car Theft Committee (A.C.T.) as a private sector partner. Membership consists of the major automobile insurance carriers in Maryland and other vehicle related industries. The A.C.T. Committee is formally incorporated in Maryland as a 501(c3) non profit organization and has contributed over \$500,000 toward public awareness, vehicle theft training programs, and direct law enforcement support, thereby enhancing the Councils efforts. In 2002, the A.C.T. Committee expanded to include Washington D.C. and is now known as the MD-DC ACT Committee.

In 1998 the Council received a \$200,000 Federal Grant to implement the "Watch Your Car" Program in Maryland. "Watch Your Car" is a National Vehicle Theft Prevention Program that allows police to stop vehicles anywhere in the United States that are displaying a special "Watch Your Car" decal between the hours of 1:00 - 5:00 A.M. to determine if the vehicle is stolen. The program is totally voluntary and at no cost to participants. There are currently over 30,000 motorists registered in the program. In May 2001, the council received a supplemental "Watch Your Car" grant in the amount of \$240,000. Grant monies were expended as of 12/31/03. The Council currently provides funding for continuation of this Program.

After six consecutive years of significant decline, vehicle theft increased from 2001-2004. During the 2001 legislative session, Council funding was reduced by \$2,000,000. This necessitated the elimination of certain programs and significant reductions in funding of those critical programs that were retained. This severe curtailment of resources was reflected in a 16% increase in 2001 vehicle theft totals. The 2002 legislature restored this funding, however, only \$732,000 was appropriated. Critical programming was lost or severely underfunded. In FY 2004, \$2.1 million was appropriated with focus on rising vehicle theft rates in the Washington Metropolitan area. The increased funding was reflected in decreasing vehicle theft rates in 2004 and 2005.

1995 was the first year of Council intervention, therefore, 1994 is used as a base year for statistical correlations. Through 2000, the most verifiable evidence of Council program achievements were:

- 1994-2000 -36% reduction in vehicle theft rates (thefts per 100,000 registered vehicles).
- 25% reduction in total thefts. This equates to 9500 fewer stolen vehicles; an economic savings of approximately \$61,000,000.
- 22% reduction in carjacking (2000 UCR Carjacking Statistics).
- As of 1/1/2006, with the exception of Prince George's County and Charles County, every jurisdiction receiving Council funding since 1995 has realized reductions in vehicle theft. Of significance is the following: 53% reduction in Howard County, 53% reduction in Baltimore County, and 55% reduction in Baltimore City. The Baltimore reduction has been the direct result of the formation of the Baltimore Regional Auto Theft Team and dedicated prosecution funding since 1995.

Because of Washington D.C. inter-jurisdictional influences, vehicle theft in Montgomery, Prince George's, and Charles Counties present different problems. Through 2005 Montgomery County has achieved a 21% decrease with a significant 26% reduction in 2004 and another 3% decrease in 2005. Vehicle theft in Prince George's county has doubled since 1994. The majority of this gain is reflected in a 92% increase over the past three years. Vehicle theft statewide decreased by 545 stolen vehicles in 2004. Prince George's County thefts increased by 857. In 2005 vehicle theft statewide decreased by 1808 stolen vehicles and Prince George's County decreased by 1240, or 7 percent.

Washington D.C. has the highest vehicle theft rates in the nation per capita (100,000 pop.). As a result of a 1998 Council initiative, the Washington Area Vehicle Enforcement Team (WAVE) based on the the Baltimore Regional Auto Theft Team concept, became operational 4/24/2000. WAVE is an interjurisdictional task force consisting of Prince George's County and Montgomery County Maryland State Police, F.B.I., Washington Metropolitan Police Department, and Arlington and Fairfax, Virginia Police Departments. However, in May 2001 the F.B.I. dropped their federal sponsorship of the program which prohibited the WAVE Unit from exercising law enforcement authority across interstate jurisdictional boundaries. This severely limited the Unit's operations until the early part of 2002 when the U.S. Marshall's Office became a partner and provided the federal authority. The lapse in time severely limited the Unit's operational effectiveness during the majority of 2001. The WAVE Unit has become very effective in vehicle theft apprehension and recovery

In December of 2004, the Council sponsored a "National Capitol Region Executive Summit" on vehicle theft. One of the results of this Summit was a proposal to expand the WAVE Team from eleven officers to 45. A detailed plan involving a 14 agency coalition was drafted and introduced by the Council. As of this publication (09/06) WAVE II has become a reality with an operating structure of 40 officers and the addition of a Professional Theft Investigation Unit encompassing Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Charles County, and Washington D.C.

In 1994 55% (4126) of all vehicle theft arrests were juveniles. In 1999 this number had dropped to 41%. Most significant was reductions in Baltimore City where the Department of Juvenile Services

implemented a comprehensive program with the assistance of Council funding. In 1995, of 687 vehicle theft arrests made by the Baltimore R.A.T.T., 311, or 55% were juveniles. By 2000 the juvenile rate had dropped to 155 or 15% out of 1053 arrests. Because of the loss of funding, the Department of Juvenile Services Program was eliminated in 2001. UCR statistics reflects that the statewide juvenile arrest rate had risen to 46% in 2002. (Baltimore R.A.T.T. - MD UCR) In 2005 RATT statistics reflected juvenile arrests remained at 15% and statewide arrests had decreased to 41%.

- From 1995 through 2005 eight vehicle theft investigation units, funded by the Council, have been responsible for the recovery of over 18,000 vehicles valued at approximately \$117,000,000 and the arrest of over 14,000 auto thieves. Five of these investigation units did not exist prior to Council funding. At a cost of approximately 16 million dollars over an 11 year period, this represents a 7.3 to 1 return on the Council investment.
- In 1994 Maryland ranked 5th in the nation in vehicle thefts per capita (per 100,000 pop.). In 1999 Maryland had fallen to 10th. However, in 2005, Maryland was in 7th position nationwide. In terms of total thefts, Maryland ranks 11th in the nation (2005 F.B.I. UCR).
- From January 1998 to January 2000, the top ten automobile insurance carriers in Maryland representing approximately 82% of the market share filed for comprehensive rate adjustments with the Maryland Insurance Administration. Vehicle theft is covered under the comprehensive portion of the automobile insurance policy. These adjustments range from a high of -25.7% by State Farm which is the largest carrier with approximately 20% of the market share, to a low of -4.7% by Liberty Mutual which has approximately 2% of the market share. Absent an in-depth actuary analysis as to what factors effected this rate reduction, we can assume that a reduction of 12,000 stolen vehicles with an economic savings of \$72,000,000 over that period of time certainly had some influence on this action (MD Insurance Administration - 1999 VTTC Annual Report).
- An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the Council was conducted by the University of Baltimore, Schaefer Center for Public Policy in 1996 and updated in 2000. This report concluded that there was a definite correlation between Council intervention and declining vehicle theft rates. In fact, analytic data predicted that absent the Council's intervention in 1995, vehicle theft rates would have continued to rise are pre-1994 levels.

The decline in Maryland vehicle theft rates since 1994 and the University of Baltimore independent evaluation strongly suggests that the Council has been successful in providing vehicle theft prevention resources to state and local jurisdictions whose efforts, in turn, have proven successful. Loss of funding and vehicle theft increases in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 substantiates this evaluation. Continued funding is an absolute priority to reverse the current theft trend and to manage the problem in the future.