

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

Counsel: Ilan Zur

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Nick Schultz, Chair

AB 1941 (Mark González) – As Introduced February 13, 2026

**As Proposed to be Amended in Committee**

**SUMMARY:** Creates new crimes of organized metal theft. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes a person who commits any of the following acts guilty of organized metal theft.
  - a) Acts in concert with one or more people to steal metal materials from wire, cable, copper, lead, solder, mercury, iron or brass which a person knows or reasonably should know is ordinarily used by or ordinarily belongs to a railroad or other transportation, telephone, telegraph, gas, water, electric light company, or a county or city engaged in furnishing public utility service, as specified, or from items owned or previously owned by a public agency, city, county, special district, or private utility, as specified, including a fire hydrant, fire department connection, maintenance hole cover or lid, backflow device or connection, or reasonably recognizable street light, traffic signal, and their reasonably recognizable related equipment (hereafter, “specified utility metal materials,”) with the intent to sell, exchange, or return the metal materials for value.
  - b) Acts in concert with two or more persons to receive, purchase, or possess specified utility metal materials knowing or believing it to have been stolen.
  - c) Acts as an agent of another individual or group of individuals to steal specified utility metal materials as part of an organized plan to commit metal theft.
  - d) Recruits, coordinates, organizes, supervises, directs, manages, or finances another to undertake any of the acts described above or acts described in any other statute defining theft of metal, except for the conduct of acting as an agent to steal specified utility metal materials.
- 2) Punishes organized metal theft as follows:
  - a) If any of the above violations, except for recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified organized metal theft acts, are committed on two or more separate occasions within a 12-month period, and if the aggregated value of the metal stolen, received, purchased, or possessed within that 12-month period exceeds \$950, the offense is punishable as an alternate-felony misdemeanor (wobbler) by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or by imprisonment for 16 months, or two or three years.
  - b) Any other violation that is not described in the immediately preceding paragraph, except for recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified organized metal theft acts, is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year.

- c) A violation of recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified organized metal theft acts, as specified, is punishable as a wobbler by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or as a jail-eligible felony by imprisonment for 16 months, or two or three years.
- 3) Provides that for the purpose of determining if the defendant acted in concert with another person, the trier of fact may consider any competent evidence, including, but not limited to:
    - a) The defendant has previously acted in concert with another person in committing acts constituting theft, or any related offense, including any conduct that occurred in counties other than the county of the current offense, if relevant to demonstrate a fact other than the defendant's disposition to commit the act.
    - b) That the defendant used or possessed an artifice, instrument, container, device, or other article capable of facilitating the removal of metal from specified utility metal materials without permission or authorization, and the use of the artifice, instrument, container, or device, or other article is part of an organized plan to commit metal theft.
    - c) The property involved in the offense is of a type or quantity that would not normally be collected or purchased for personal use, and the property is intended for resale.
  - 4) Prohibits, in a prosecution under this bill, a prosecutor from being required to charge any other co-participant of the organized metal theft.
  - 5) Provides that this bill does not preclude or prohibit prosecution for vandalism or the charging of specified sentence enhancements.
  - 6) Authorizes local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities, including, but not limited to, telecommunication companies, recycling companies, and private utility companies, to provide information about theft of commodity metals, including, but not limited to, ferrous metal, copper, brass, aluminum, nickel, stainless steel, and alloys, to the Department of Justice (DOJ), and requires the DOJ make this information available to such local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) States that every person who feloniously steals, takes, carries, leads, or drives away the personal property of another, or who fraudulently appropriates property which has been entrusted to them, or who knowingly and designedly, by any false or fraudulent representation or pretense, defrauds any other person of money, labor or real or personal property, is guilty of theft. Divides theft into two degrees: petty theft and grand theft. (Pen. Code §§ 484, subd. (a) 486.)
- 2) Punishes petty theft as a misdemeanor, punishable by fine not exceeding \$1,000, or by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding six months, or both. (Pen. Code, § 490.)
- 3) Defines grand theft as theft of money, labor, real or personal property of a value exceeding \$950, and punishes grand theft as a wobbler – subject to imprisonment in county jail not

exceeding one year, or by imprisonment in county jail for 16 months, two years, or three years (Pen. Code, §§ 487, 489.)

- 4) Provides that in any case involving one or more acts of theft or shoplifting, including but not limited to, shoplifting, theft, and petty theft, the value of property or merchandise stolen may be aggregated into a single count or charge, with the sum of the value of all property or merchandise being the values considered in determining the degree of theft. (Pen. Code, § 490.3.)
- 5) Makes it a crime to buy or receive stolen property. If the value of the property is less than \$950, the offense is a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment in county jail for one year. If the value of the property is over \$950, the offense is punishable as a wobbler – subject to imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year, or by imprisonment in county jail for 16 months, two years, or three years (Pen. Code, §§ 487, 489, 496.)
- 6) Provides that a person who has two or more prior convictions for specified theft offenses, including petty theft, grand theft, shoplifting, or receipt of stolen property, and who is convicted of petty theft or shoplifting, is punishable by imprisonment in county jail for up to one year, or by 16 months, or two or three years, and makes a second or subsequent conviction of petty theft with two priors punishable by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding one year or by imprisonment in state prison. (Pen. Code, § 666.1, subd. (a).)
- 7) Provides that any person that: 1) acts in concert with one or more persons to steal merchandise with the intent to sell, exchange, or return the merchandise for value; 2) acts in concert with two or more persons to receive, purchase, or possess merchandise knowing or believing it to have been stolen; 3) acts as the agent of another individual or group to steal merchandise from one or more merchants as part of an organized plan to commit theft; or, 4) recruits, coordinates, organizes, supervises, directs, manages, or finances another to undertake acts of retail theft, is guilty of organized retail theft. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (a).)
- 8) Punishes organized retail theft as follows:
  - a) If violations of the above provisions, except the recruiting, organizing or financing another to engage in retail theft, are committed on two or more separate occasions within one year, and if the aggregated value of the merchandise stolen, received, purchased, or possessed within that period exceeds \$950 the offense is punishable as a misdemeanor by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or as a jail-eligible felony.
  - b) Any other violation of the above provisions, except the recruiting, organizing, or financing of another to engage in retail theft, is punishable as a misdemeanor by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year.
  - c) Recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake acts of organized retail theft is punishable as either a misdemeanor by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or as a jail-eligible felony. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (b).)
- 9) Establishes additional penalties for theft of certain metals, including copper:
  - a) Makes it a wobbler, punishable by a fine not exceeding \$2,500 or imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year, or by 16 months, or two, or three years in county jail,

and a \$10,000 fine, for any person to steal, carry, or take away copper materials of another, including, but not limited to copper wire, copper cable, copper tubing and copper piping, which are of a value exceeding \$950. (Pen. Code, § 487j.)

- b) Makes it a crime to unlawfully purchase or receive certain metal materials, as follows:
  - i) Prohibits a dealer or collector of junk, metals, or secondhand materials, from buying or receiving any wire, cable, copper, lead, solder, mercury, iron, or brass which they know or reasonably should know is ordinarily used by or ordinarily belongs to a county, city, or a public utility or transportation company, as specified, without using due diligence to ascertain that the person selling or delivering the property has legal right to do so.
  - ii) Makes this crime a wobbler, punishable by up to one year in county jail, or 16 months, or two, or three years in county jail, or by a fine not more than \$5,000. (Pen. Code, § 496a, subd. (a).)
- c) Makes it a crime to possess certain stolen public agency-related materials, as follows:
  - i) Prohibits any person who is engaged in the salvage, recycling, purchase, or sale of scrap metal from possessing specified items that were owned or previously owned by any public agency, city, county, city and county, special district, or private utility that have been stolen or obtained in any manner constituting theft or extortion, knowing the property to be so stolen or obtained, or failing to report possession of the items.
  - ii) Punishes this offense by up to a \$5,000 fine, in addition to any other penalty provided by law. (Pen. Code, § 496e.)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Author's Statement:** According to the author, “Copper wire theft continues to plague communities across the state—leaving neighborhoods in the dark, draining taxpayer resources, and creating significant public safety hazards.

“Copper wire theft is not a victimless crime, it is a crime that leaves Abuelitas without power for A/C or heat, brings our public transportation to a halt, blackouts phone service to rural community members, and leaves our neighborhoods in the dark. AB 1941 sends a clear message. If you treat our neighborhoods as salvage, if you destroy our infrastructure for some quick cash, if you endanger our community with these senseless crimes, there will be consequences.”

- 2) **Need for this Bill:** Recent reports suggest that theft of copper wiring from certain public utility infrastructure has led to significant interruptions in telecommunications services and other public utility services such as street lighting. According to the Bureau of Street Lighting, which maintains over 223,000 streetlights in the City of Los Angeles (LA):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LA Lights, *About* (accessed April 22, 2025), available at: <https://lalights.lacity.org/about/>

Over several years, a dramatic increase in the number of theft and vandalism incidents has significantly impacted the street lighting network. In the span of just four years between Fiscal Year 2017/2018 (where the Bureau saw 607 theft-related incidents) and FY2021/2022 (where the Bureau saw 6344 [Copper Wire & Power Theft] CWPT theft-related incidents) was a 10-fold increase in reported issues. And while these types of incidents are endemic to electrical and lighting systems due to the value of metals and electricity, the cumulative damage – and the time and resources required to fix such an issue – has led to months-long backlogs of lighting outages.

Generally speaking, routine maintenance requires a couple hours of work. In comparison, copper theft may take several days, and in some cases, weeks to repair. It is akin to rewiring your house, rather than replacing a light bulb.

Copper Wire necessitates proper coordination among different disciplines (Wire Pulling Crews, Cement Crews, and Welding Crews). Secondly, circuit configurations and existing pole types can influence the repair times and complicate electrical repairs. Welders might need to fabricate vandal-proof doors for ornamental poles, and in some instances, the need to procure materials can result in further delays. Lastly, encampments, field conditions, and other obstructions might prevent crews from completing work in a timely manner...

The increasing incidents of theft and vandalism create unsafe conditions by leaving communities in the dark for extended periods of time, which can contribute to community safety issues like crime, pedestrian safety, and vehicle collisions. These types of repairs are extensive and costly, which contributes to the backlog, requires additional resources, and exacerbates repair timelines.<sup>2</sup>

In response to increases in metal theft, LA City leaders created the Heavy Metal Task Force in early 2024, and early enforcement actions led to 82 arrests and the recovery of more than 2,000 pounds of copper wire.<sup>3</sup> In addition, on June 5, 2025, the Attorney General issued an information bulletin to all California law enforcement agencies, noting the spike in copper theft and summarizing relevant theft statutes and laws governing junk dealer or recyclers' obligations to collect and report information regarding the receipt, purchase, and sale of copper wire.<sup>4</sup>

- 3) **Effect of this Bill:** In 2018, in response to increases in retail theft across the state, the Legislature passed AB 1065 (Jones-Sawyer) Chapter 803, Statutes of 2018, which created the crime of organized retail theft and allowed the crime to be punished as a wobbler. AB 1065 contained a sunset date, which was extended multiple times since its enactment, and was removed in 2024, making the crime of organized retail theft permanent. (SB 92 (Wahab), Chapter 982, Statutes of 2024.) The crime of organized retail theft generally prohibits acting in concert to steal retail merchandise, acting in concert to receive or possess merchandise

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<sup>2</sup> LA Lights, *Outages and Issues* (Accessed April 22, 2025), available at: [https://lalights.lacity.org/residents/outages\\_and\\_issues.html](https://lalights.lacity.org/residents/outages_and_issues.html)

<sup>3</sup> Stallworth, *More than 80 arrests made in new effort to battle theft of copper, metal in LA*, ABC Eye Witness News (Aug. 1, 2024), available at: <https://abc7.com/post/los-angeles-efforts-battle-theft-copper-scrap-metal-have-led-80-arrests-metal-recovery-officials-say/15128029/>

<sup>4</sup> California Department of Justice, *2025-DLE-12: State Statutes Applicable to Copper Wire Theft* (June 5, 2025), available at: <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/2025-dle-12.pdf>

knowing it to be stolen, acting as an agent of another to steal merchandise as part of an organized plan, or recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified retail theft acts. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (b).) If organized retail theft violations, except for the financing and directing provision, are committed on two or more separate occasions within twelve months, and the aggregated value of stolen merchandise within that period exceeds \$950, the offense is a wobbler. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (b)(1).) The specific offense of recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified organized retail theft acts is itself punishable as a wobbler. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (b)(4).)

This bill is substantially similar to the organized retail theft statute. However, instead of applying to theft of merchandise from merchants' premises, it applies to theft of specified utility metal materials. This bill makes any of the following organized metal theft: 1) acting in concert with one or more people to steal metal materials from specified public utility metal materials, with the intent to sell, exchange, or return the metal materials for value; 2) acting in concert with two or more persons to receive, purchase, or possess specified utility metal materials knowing or believing it to have been stolen; 3) acting as an agent of another individual or group to steal specified utility metal materials as part of an organized plan to commit metal theft; and 4) recruiting, coordinating, organizing, supervising, directing, managing, or financing another to undertake specified organized metal theft acts. Like the organized retail theft statute, if organized metal theft violations, except for the financing and directing provision, are committed on two or more separate occasions within twelve months, and the aggregated value of metal stolen, received, purchased, or possessed within that period exceeds \$950, the offense is a wobbler. (Pen. Code, § 490.4, subd. (b)(1).) For example, a person who acts with another to steal \$500 in copper wire from a streetlight, and six months later knowingly receives \$500 in specified metal utility materials stolen by two co-conspirators, may be charged with a felony. Similar to organized retail theft, this bill makes the specific offense of recruiting, organizing, or financing another to undertake specified metal theft acts a wobbler. This bill prohibits a prosecutor from being required to charge any other co-participant in the organized metal theft.

Additionally, like the organized retail theft statute, this bill outlines certain information that may be considered in determining if a defendant acted in concert with another person. Specifically, it provides that the trier of fact may consider any competent evidence which includes: 1) the defendant has previously acted in concert with another person in committing acts constituting theft, or any related offense, as specified; 2) the defendant used a specified device capable of facilitating the removal of metal from specified utility metal materials without permission or authorization, and the use of the device is part of an organized plan to commit metal theft; and 3) property involved in the offense is of a type or quantity that would not normally be collected or purchased for personal use, and the property is intended for resale.

Finally, this bill authorizes the sharing of certain metal theft information between law enforcement agencies. Specifically, it authorizes local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities, including, but not limited to, telecommunication companies, recycling companies, and private utility companies, to provide information about theft of commodity metals, including, but not limited to, ferrous metal, copper, brass, aluminum, nickel, stainless steel, and alloys, to the DOJ. If such information is shared, the DOJ must make this information available to such local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities.

- 4) **Existing Penalties for Conduct Prohibited by this Bill:** Numerous criminal penalties can already be leveraged against the type of metal theft from public agency infrastructure or public utility materials at issue in this bill. Given the availability of such existing tools, the need for an additional criminal statute tailored to metal theft is somewhat unclear. Available tools include the following:

a) *Theft*

A person who feloniously steals or takes away the personal property of another, or who knowingly and designedly, by any false or fraudulent representation or pretense, defrauds any other person of money, labor or real or personal property, is guilty of theft. (Pen. Code §§ 484, subd. (a) 486.) If the value of the property is under \$950, it is petty theft punishable by imprisonment in county jail for one year. If the value of stolen property exceeds \$950, the offense can be charged as grand theft, punishable by imprisonment in a county jail for up to one year, or by imprisonment in the county jail for 16 months, two years, or three years. (Pen. Code, §§ 487, 489, 496.) Here, a person who directly steals copper wire from a streetlamp or telecommunications line could be prosecuted for petty theft or grand theft, depending on the amount of copper stolen.

Notably, after the passage of Prop 36 in November of 2024, it is now easier for prosecutors to charge persons with grand, rather than petty theft. First, Prop 36 targeted repeat theft offenders, by making a conviction for petty theft, where that person has two prior theft convictions, punishable by imprisonment in county jail for up to one year or by 16 months, or two or three years; and it made a second or subsequent conviction of petty theft with two priors punishable by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding one year or by imprisonment in state prison. (Pen. Code, § 666.1, subd. (a).) Here, a person with two prior theft convictions who is arrested for petty theft for stealing copper wire from public utility infrastructure, such as a telecommunications line, can face up to three years in county jail. (Pen. Code, § 666.1, subd. (a).)

Second, Prop 36 made it easier to aggregate the value of stolen property in order to trigger the \$950 grand theft threshold. Previously, the value of stolen property could be aggregated to charge grand theft where the acts were motivated by one intention, one impulse, and one plan. (Pen. Code, § 487, subd. (e).) However, Prop 36 authorized a more generous method of aggregation by stating that, in multiple cases of theft, the value of property may be aggregated into a single charge, with the sum of the value of all property or merchandise being the value considered in determining the degree of theft. (Pen. Code, § 490.3.) As such, pursuant to Prop 36's aggregation standard, prosecutors now have greater leeway to aggregate all theft associated with the type of copper wire theft at issue in this bill, making it easier to charge such persons with grand theft.

b) *Theft of Copper Materials*

The Penal Code contains a separate copper wire theft statute that imposes higher criminal fines for misdemeanor theft of copper wire than for misdemeanor theft more generally. Specifically, existing law makes it wobbler, punishable by a fine not exceeding \$2,500 or imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year, or by 16 months, or two, or three years in county jail, or a \$10,000 fine, for any person to steal, carry, or take away copper materials

of another, including, but not limited to, copper wire, copper cable, copper tubing and copper piping, which are of a value exceeding \$950. (Pen. Code, § 487j.) As such, a prosecutor may charge a person who steals copper wire from a telecommunications line as regular theft or theft of copper wire. Notably, a person prosecuted for misdemeanor theft of copper wire may be subject to a higher fine (\$2,500) than if charged for regular petty theft (\$1,000). (Pen. Code, §§ 487j, 490.)

c) *Receipt of Stolen Property*

Existing law makes it a crime to buy or receive stolen property with knowledge that the property is stolen. (Pen. Code, 496, subd. (a).) To convict a person for buying or receiving stolen property, the prosecution must prove: 1) the defendant bought, received, or sold property that had been stolen or obtained by extortion; 2) the defendant knew that the property had been stolen or obtained by extortion; and 3) the defendant actually knew of the presence of the property. (1 CALCRIM 1750 (2025).) If the value of the stolen property is under \$950, this crime is a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or up to a \$1,000 fine. If the value of received stolen property exceeds \$950, it is punishable as a wobbler – subject to imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year (or up to a \$1,000 fine), or by imprisonment in county jail for 16 months, two years, or three years, or a fine up to \$10,000. (Pen. Code, §§ 487, 489, 496.) As such, individuals who are not directly involved in the theft of metal materials from public utility infrastructure, but receive over \$950 in copper wire with knowledge that it was stolen, can be prosecuted with a felony for receipt of stolen property.

d) *Receipt of Copper or Specified Materials Belonging to a Public Agency*

Additionally, a person engaged in the salvage, recycling, purchase, or sale of scrap metal is already prohibited from possessing specified public utility-related materials, such as fire hydrant parts, reasonably recognizable streetlights, and irrigation wiring, among others, that have been stolen, with knowledge that the property was stolen. (Pen. Code, § 496e, subd. (a).) A violation of this prohibition is, in addition to any other penalty, punishable by up to a \$5,000 fine. (Pen. Code, § 496e, subd. (b).) Similarly, dealers or collectors of junk and metals are also prohibited from purchasing or receiving certain metal materials they know ordinarily belong to certain public agencies, without using due diligence to determine that the seller lawfully owns the property. (Pen. Code, § 496e, subd. (a).) This offense is a wobbler, punishable by up to three years in county jail or a fine of up to \$5,000.

e) *Cutting or Disconnecting A Utility Line*

There have been reports that individuals have damaged telecommunications lines during efforts to steal the copper wire contained within such infrastructure. Notably, it is already a crime for a person to take down, remove, injure, disconnect, cut, or obstruct a line of a telephone, cable television, or any line used to conduct electricity. (Pen. Code, § 591.) This crime is punishable as a misdemeanor by up to one year in county jail or a fine of up to \$1,000, or as a felony by 16 months, two, or three years in county jail, and a fine not more than \$10,000. (*Ibid.*) As such, an individual who damages or cuts an electrical line in the process of stealing copper wire from that line can face up to three years in county jail.

f) *Vandalism*

A person who steals copper wire from public utility infrastructure, damaging that infrastructure in the process, may also be charged with vandalism. Vandalism requires that the defendant maliciously defaced with graffiti or damaged, or destroyed, real or personal property, and the defendant did not own the property. (Pen. Code, § 594, subd. (a); 2 CALCRIM 2900 (2025).) When a person commits vandalism with respect to real property, vehicles, signs, fixtures, furnishings, or property belonging to a public entity, it creates an inference that the person did not own the property or have permission to damage the property. (*Ibid.*) The value threshold to charge a person with felony vandalism is lower than the threshold to charge a person with grand theft. If the amount damaged is less than \$400, vandalism is punishable by imprisonment in county jail for up to one year, or by a fine of \$1,000. (Pen. Code, § 594, subd. (b)(2)(A).) However, if the amount of damage is over \$400, it is punishable as a wobbler – subject to imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or by imprisonment in county jail for 16 months, two years, or three years, or a fine up to \$10,000. (Pen. Code, § 594, subd. (b)(1).) If the amount of damage is \$10,000 or more, a person can receive a fine of up to \$50,000. (*Ibid.*) In sum, if a person steals \$100 of copper wire from a streetlight or telecommunications line, an amount that would only constitute petty theft, but creates over \$400 in damage in the process, that person can be charged with felony vandalism.

g) *Sentence Enhancements for Theft and Damage to Property*

Further, a person who steals copper wire, or receives stolen wire, where the ultimate value of the amount stolen or damaged exceeds \$50,000, can be subject to additional sentence enhancements created by Prop. 36. Specifically, Prop. 36 provided that, if a person takes or damages property in the attempted commission of a felony, or commits a felony violation of buying or receiving stolen property, a court is required to impose additional sentence enhancements of between one year and four years, depending on the value of the property taken. (Pen. Code, § 12022.6.) As such, a person, or group of persons, who steal copper wire from a telecommunications line in excess of \$50,000 in value, or causes over \$50,000 in damages to the line, could not only be prosecuted with felony grand theft but also could be subject to multi-year enhancements depending on the amount stolen or damaged.

Similarly, any person who acts in concert with two or more persons to take, attempt to take, damage, or destroy property, in the commission or attempted commission of a felony, shall be punished by an additional and consecutive term of imprisonment of one, two, or three years. (Pen. Code, § 12022.65.) Accordingly, if a person acts in concert to steal public utility materials, where the property stolen or damaged does not meet the \$50,000 threshold mentioned above, they can still be subject to a sentence enhancement under this provision.

- 5) **Argument in Support:** According to the *California Broadband and Video Association and US-Telecom*, “[t]he rising market value of copper, which is used in many communications facilities, has created a powerful incentive for criminal theft and vandalism targeting communications and other infrastructure across California. Bad actors steal copper and related communications equipment for resale—in the indiscriminate search for copper, they also sabotage modern communications facilities that may contain little or no copper, including fiber-optic transmission lines, underground vaults, and wireless communications sites. These attacks can cause widespread outages, disrupt emergency communications, and jeopardize public safety.

“As documented in the Critical Attacks on Communications Infrastructure report, organized metal theft is no longer a nuisance crime – it is a direct threat to public safety. Between January and June 2025, communications companies across the country reported 9,770 incidents of intentional theft and/or vandalism targeting their infrastructure. California accounted for 6,003 incidents, representing 61% of all recorded intentional theft or vandalism incidents nationwide.

“AB 1941 builds upon previous efforts to tackle copper wire theft by establishing a new tool of “organized metal theft”, allowing prosecutors to bring enhanced charges for coordinated or repeated thefts. The bill also supports improved information sharing among law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities such as telecommunication companies and junk dealers and recyclers through a statewide database to help identify patterns, connect cases, and dismantle theft rings.

“These incidents of theft and vandalism have become increasingly common and cause unnecessary service disruptions that threaten California consumers and businesses. AB 1941 gives California added tools needed to stop coordinated theft rings that cut off 911 access, disrupt essential services, and endanger communities.”

- 6) **Argument in Opposition:** According to *Californians United for a Responsible Budget*, AB 1941 “Metal theft, by an individual or a group, is already criminalized under existing law. Under the general grand theft statute, any theft of materials whose value exceeds \$950 is punishable up to a year in prison. Theft of less than \$950 in materials would lead to a petty theft charge, carrying up to six months of incarcerations and \$1000 fine. If multiple petty thefts occur in line with one intention, impulse, or plan, the thefts may be aggregated into a grand theft charge. When this theft is in concert with others, each individual faces the full punishment available under the relevant statute for aiding and abetting the crime. This addition is unnecessary and redundant given current law.

“AB 1941’s increased punishment schemes for group theft of metals will not deter crime. AB 1941 would double the maximum punishment for certain misdemeanors, ratchet up certain misdemeanors into potential felonies, and create a 12-month-long aggregation window for grand theft of metals. Evidence indicates that applying longer criminal sentences has failed to deter crime. Other studies demonstrate that the severity of punishment does not generally have an increased effect on deterrence. Rather, studies have concluded that certainty of punishment, that someone will be punished for a particular crime, has a greater deterrence effect than the severity of the punishment itself.

“Finally, local officials are already identifying non-carceral solutions to copper metal theft. Los Angeles city Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez has invested \$500,000 from her discretionary fund to have solar-powered lights installed in Lincoln Heights and Cypress Park to keep the neighborhoods bright and prevent copper wire theft.”

- 7) **Related Legislation:** AB 2337 (Lackey) makes theft of property taken without lawful authority by a public officer under color of authority grand theft, among other changes. AB 2337 is pending a hearing in this Committee.
- 8) **Prior Legislation:**

- a) AB 476 (González), Chapter 694, Statutes of 2025, increases fines for crimes related to the possession or purchase of specified items previously owned by a public utility provider or public agency; expands the list of items that a junk dealer is prohibited from possessing to include specified items previously owned by a public agency or local government; and expands record-keeping requirements for junk dealers, as specified.
- b) AB 1218 (Soria), of the 2024-2025 Legislative Session, would make it a wobbler for a person to possess certain copper materials without written proof of lawful ownership. The hearing on AB 1218 was cancelled at the request of the author.
- c) AB 2943 (Zbur), Chapter 168, Statutes of 2024, creates a new crime of unlawful deprivation of a retail business opportunity and makes various changes to provisions of law on arrest authority, aggregation, and probation terms for theft-related offenses.
- d) AB 1802 (Jones-Sawyer), Chapter 166, Statutes of 2024, eliminates the sunset date for the crime of organized retail theft and for the existence of a task force established by the California Highway Patrol to analyze organized retail theft and vehicle burglary and to assist local law enforcement in counties identified as having elevated property crime.
- e) SB 982 (Wahab), Chapter 982, Statutes of 2024, bill removes the sunset date on the organized retail theft statute, thereby making the operation of the law permanent.
- f) AB 331 (Jones-Sawyer), Chapter 113, Statutes of 2021, extended the sunset date for organized retail theft through January 1, 2026.
- g) AB 2356 (Rodriguez), Chapter 22, Statutes of 2022, expanded the definition of “grand theft” where the aggregate amount taken by all participants exceeds \$950.
- h) AB 1065 (Jones-Sawyer), Chapter 803, Statutes of 2018, created the crime of organized retail theft and expanded jurisdiction to prosecute cases of theft, as specified.
- i) SB 1387 (Berryhill), Chapter 656, Statutes of 2012, this bill prohibits junk dealers and recyclers from possessing fire hydrants, manhole covers or backflow devices without proper certification, as specified; and provides that possession of stolen fire hydrants, manhole covers or backflow devices by persons engaged in the salvage, recycling, purchase or sale of scrap metal, shall be punishable by an additional fine up to \$3000.
- j) AB 316 (Carter), Chapter 317, Statutes of 2011, creates a section for grand theft of copper materials and adds a fine of up to \$2,500 on to the existing penalties as specified.
- k) AB 1859 (Adams), Chapter 659, Statutes of 2008, creates a fine of not more than \$3,000 for any person who knowingly receives any part of a fire hydrant, including bronze or brass fittings and parts.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

City of San Jose (Co-Sponsor)  
Advance Sf  
Arcadia Police Officers' Association  
Asian Pacific American Community Center  
At&t  
Bizfed Central Valley  
Brea Police Association  
Burbank Police Officers' Association  
Burbank/burbank Redevelopment Agency; City of  
Calbroadband  
Calcom Association  
California Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce  
California Association of School Police Chiefs  
California Coalition of School Safety Professionals  
California Narcotic Officers' Association  
California Police Chiefs Association  
California Reserve Peace Officers Association  
California State Sheriffs' Association  
Cameron House  
Central City Association of Los Angeles  
Central Valley Business Federation  
Chamber San Mateo County  
Chinese Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco  
City of Hidden Hills  
City of Pico Rivera  
Claremont Police Officers Association  
Corona Police Officers Association  
County of Yolo  
CTIA - the Wireless Association  
Culver City Police Officers' Association  
Curry Senior Center  
Fairfield-suisun Chamber of Commerce  
Fremont Chamber of Commerce  
Fresno Chamber of Commerce  
Fullerton Police Officers' Association  
Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce  
Hayward Chamber of Commerce  
Joint Venture Silicon Valley  
Lakewood; City of  
League of California Cities  
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office  
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
Los Angeles School Police Management Association  
Los Angeles School Police Officers Association  
Los Angeles; City of  
Mayor Matt Mahan, City of San Jose  
Milpitas Chamber of Commerce  
Mission Bit  
Monterey Bay Economic Partnership

Monterey County Board of Supervisors  
Monterey County District Attorney's Office - ODA - Salinas, CA  
Monterey County Farm Bureau  
Murrieta Police Officers' Association  
Napa Chamber of Commerce  
Napa County Farm Bureau  
Newport Beach Police Association  
Oakland Chamber of Commerce  
Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce  
Palos Verdes Police Officers Association  
Placer County Deputy Sheriffs' Association  
Pomona Police Officers' Association  
Port of Redwood City  
Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center  
Riverside Police Officers Association  
Riverside Sheriffs' Association  
Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce  
San Bruno Education Foundation  
San Francisco African American Chamber of Commerce  
San Francisco Chamber of Commerce  
San Francisco Police Officers Association  
San Francisco Tech Council  
San Jose Downtown Association  
San Mateo County Economic Development Association (SAMCEDA)  
San Rafael Chamber of Commerce  
Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce  
Santa Rosa Metro Chamber  
Self-help for the Elderly  
Sf.citi  
Silicon Valley Leadership Group  
United States Telecom Association DbA Ustelecom - the Broadband Association  
Wireless Infrastructure Association

### **Opposition**

ACLU California Action  
California Public Defenders Association  
Californians United for a Responsible Budget  
Community Works West  
Initiate Justice  
Justice2jobs Coalition  
LA Defensa  
Legal Services for Prisoners With Children  
San Francisco Public Defender  
Smart Justice California, a Project of Beyond Impact  
Vera Institute of Justice

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