

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
AB 1941 (Mark González) – As Amended March 26, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 8 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill creates the crime of organized metal theft and establishes an information-sharing framework between law enforcement and the Department of Justice for metal theft data.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Makes it a crime to act in concert with others to steal, receive, or possess specified utility metal materials with the intent to sell or exchange them for value, or to recruit, organize, or finance others to commit metal theft.
- 2) Punishes organized metal theft as a wobbler if violations are committed on two or more occasions within 12 months and the aggregated value exceeds \$950; punishes recruiting or financing organized metal theft as a wobbler regardless of value.
- 3) Authorizes local law enforcement, public agencies, and private entities to share metal theft information with DOJ, and requires DOJ to make that information available to participating agencies and entities.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Incarceration costs (local funds, General Fund) to the counties and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Actual incarceration costs will depend on the number of convictions, the length of each sentence, and whether each sentence must be served in county jail or state prison. The average annual cost to incarcerate one person in county jail is approximately \$29,000, though costs are higher in larger counties. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the average annual cost to incarcerate one person in state prison is \$128,000. CDCR estimates the annual cost is \$135,921. County incarceration costs are not subject to reimbursement by the state. However, overcrowding in county jails creates cost pressure on the General Fund because the state has historically granted new funding to counties to offset overcrowding resulting from public safety realignment. If this bill results in only a handful of new convictions per year, the resulting cost of incarceration to the state could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- 2) Unknown costs to the Department of Justice to implement the reporting requirements in this bill.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing

COMMENTS:

California has experienced a significant increase in metal theft targeting public infrastructure, particularly copper wire used in streetlights, telecommunications lines, and electrical systems. The City of Los Angeles reported a tenfold increase in theft-related streetlight incidents between fiscal year 2017-18 and 2021-22. California accounted for approximately 61 percent of all reported intentional theft or vandalism incidents targeting communications infrastructure nationwide in the first half of 2025, according to industry data cited in the policy committee analysis.

The bill is modeled on the organized retail theft statute (Penal Code Section 490.4), which was created in 2018 and made permanent in 2024. It applies the same structure — acting in concert, aggregation of value over a 12-month period, wobbler penalties — to theft of specified utility metal materials rather than retail merchandise. Prosecution and conviction data suggest Section 490.4 has given prosecutors a useful charging tool, but no study has isolated the statute's independent effect on retail theft rates.

The policy committee analysis notes that the conduct targeted by this bill is already prosecutable under numerous existing statutes, including grand theft, theft of copper materials, receipt of stolen property, vandalism, and cutting or disconnecting utility lines, as well as Proposition 36's enhanced aggregation rules and sentence enhancements for property crimes exceeding \$50,000.

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