

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

CSA1 Bill Id:AB 476 Author:(Mark González)

As Amended Ver:September 4, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

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.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Lessen from \$10,000 to \$5,000 the fine amount for the felony crime of purchasing or receiving specified public utility materials.
- 2) Delete a provision prohibiting a junk dealer or recycler from purchasing nonferrous metals from a minor.
- 3) Modify the list of materials previously owned by a public agency that a junk dealer or recycler cannot lawfully possess, except as specified.
- 4) Modify the list of materials previously owned by a public agency that possession of by a person who is engaged in the salvage, recycling, purchase, or sale of scrap metal is a crime if they knew the property was stolen and failed to report the possession of the items.
- 5) Add co-authors.

COMMENTS

The issue of copper wire theft has been well-documented over the last several years. Dozens of news stories recount extensive damage to public and private infrastructure and utilities, resulting in millions of dollars in repair and replacement costs, as well as power outages and disruptions to landline, internet, and emergency response services. Recent thefts correspond with record-high prices for copper, which is commonly found in telecommunication and utility wires and can be extracted for sale. Notably, the retail value of stolen copper is often a fraction of the cost to repair infrastructure damaged during the theft of such wires.

The harms of copper theft generally fall into the following categories: 1) Economic consequences stemming from repair and replacement costs for local governments and private industry, higher tax burden and costs for residents and consumers, and reduction of funds for other essential services; and 2) safety consequences resulting from removing copper wires from streetlights and electrical systems. The proponents of this bill assert that unlit streets increase the risk of accidents and crime. Moreover, tampered infrastructure becomes dangerous. Additionally, phone, internet, and other service disruptions caused by outages undermine emergency response.

Junk dealers and recyclers are heavily regulated to prevent the purchase and sale of stolen materials. For example, junk dealers and recyclers are required to keep a detailed written record for each sale or purchase of all junk, subject to review by law enforcement, for up to two years. The sale or purchase of nonferrous materials is subject to stricter regulation, including a three-

day hold before the seller may receive payment for the material. Junk dealers and recyclers are also required to take a photograph or video of nonferrous material and obtain the thumbprint of the seller.

This bill endeavors to deter copper wire theft in various ways. First, this bill would increase record-keeping requirements pertaining to the purchase or sale of junk. Second, this bill would expand prohibitions on the possession of specified materials owned or previously owned by a public agency, local government, or private utility, without their authorization, as specified. Third, this bill would increase the maximum fine that may be imposed on dealers or collectors of junk, metal, or secondhand materials, who knowingly purchase specified metals that ordinarily belong to a local government or a public utility or transportation company by specifying that the offense is punishable by up to a \$1,000 fine if prosecuted as a misdemeanor and up to a \$5,000 fine if prosecuted as a felony. Fourth, this bill would increase the additional fine that may be imposed for knowingly possessing certain stolen public utility materials from \$3,000 to \$5,000.

According to the Author

"In my district, the City of Los Angeles has seen a dramatic increase in streetlight outages, more than doubling since 2021. The city's Bureau of Street Lighting reported approximately 45,000 service requests in 2024 alone, many of which were due to theft or vandalism. One particularly egregious case involved the theft of 38,000 feet—nearly seven miles—of copper from the Sixth Street Bridge, resulting in repair costs of approximately \$2.5 million, despite the stolen metal's street value being a mere \$11,000. These crimes go beyond financial losses; they create unsafe conditions for residents and businesses by leaving streets, neighborhoods, and business corridors in complete darkness.

Arguments in Support

As a co-sponsor of this bill, the *League of California Cities* writes in support:

This legislation is a crucial step toward protecting California's public infrastructure and ensuring the safety and functionality of essential services that communities rely on daily. Metal theft has become a widespread and costly issue, severely impacting critical infrastructure components such as streetlights, fire hydrants and fire department connections, manhole covers, electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, and backflow prevention devices. Thieves often target these public assets due to the high value of precious metal, specifically copper, leaving behind significant damage that endangers public safety and imposes burdensome repair costs on local governments and businesses. The consequences of metal theft are far-reaching [and the] financial burden of repairing and replacing stolen infrastructure components falls on taxpayers, utility providers, and municipalities, draining resources that could otherwise be used for community development and essential services.

Arguments in Opposition

Californians United for a Responsible Budget, *American Civil Liberties Union California Action*, and *La Defensa* write in opposition: "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 three years 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."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) Unknown, potentially significant cost pressures to the state funded trial court system to adjudicate alleged violations of this measure (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund). The fiscal impact of this bill to the courts will depend on many unknowns, including the number of cases filed and the factors unique to each case. An eight-hour court day costs approximately \$10,500 in staff in workload. If court days exceed 10, costs to the trial courts could reach hundreds of thousands of dollars. While the courts are not funded on a workload basis, an increase in workload could result in delayed court services and would put pressure on the General Fund to fund additional staff and resources and to increase the amount appropriated to backfill for trial court operations.
- 2) Unknown, potentially significant costs (local funds) to the counties to incarcerate people for the crimes created by this bill. The average annual cost to incarcerate one person in county jail varies by county, but likely ranges from \$70,000 to \$90,000 per year. The average annual cost to incarcerate one person in county jail varies by county, but likely ranges from \$70,000 to \$90,000 per year. Actual incarceration costs to counties will depend on the number of convictions and the length of each sentence. Generally, county incarceration costs are not reimbursable state mandates pursuant to Proposition 30 (2012).
- 3) The Department of Justice does not anticipate any significant costs.

VOTES:

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 18-0-0

YES: Berman, Flora, Ahrens, Alanis, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Hadwick, Haney, Irwin, Jackson, Krell, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ASM PUBLIC SAFETY: 9-0-0

YES: Schultz, Alanis, Mark González, Bonta, Harabedian, Lackey, Nguyen, Ramos, Sharp-Collins

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz,

Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

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