

# 2021

PENNSYLVANIA AUTO THEFT PREVENTION AUTHORITY  
**ANNUAL REPORT**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

02. LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR

03. WHAT IS THE PENNSYLVANIA AUTO THEFT PREVENTION AUTHORITY?

05. FUNDING & SKILLS

08. GRANTEES

12. PUBLIC EDUCATION & PREVENTION

15. TRAINING OVERVIEW

17. ATPA IMPACT

19. CASE HIGHLIGHTS

26. BOARD MEMBERS

## TO THE HONORABLE GOVERNOR TOM WOLF AND MEMBERS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

In 2021, we saw a historic rise in vehicle crimes, including carjackings, catalytic converter thefts, and general auto theft, predominantly in Philadelphia. Carjackings and catalytic converter theft rates show an even sharper increase. Carjackings in Philadelphia increased an extraordinary 85 percent from 2020 to 2021, according to the Philadelphia Police Department, and catalytic converter thefts increased 265 percent in the same time period!

While Philadelphia crime and auto theft are at distressing levels, the theft rate elsewhere in Pennsylvania remains at consistently low levels compared to the rest of the country. We are one of the few states that still have an organization like the Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA).

Since the ATPA's inception in 1994, we've helped reduce vehicle theft in the Commonwealth by 73 percent (compared to a national decrease of 47 percent\*). Last year, 7,738 vehicles were stolen in Pennsylvania.

The ATPA is a legislatively mandated, public-private entity that **cannot and does not use tax dollars**. The organization is funded entirely by assessments of Pennsylvania property & casualty insurers. Grants are made to law enforcement agencies based solely on manifest need. The Authority's renewal of those grants is contingent on audits and results. For every dollar assessed since inception, we have realized a \$6.40 return — **all without cost to the Commonwealth**.

We are working with our grantees, a newly formed task force, and our partners across the state and across the globe to provide information and resources to attack vehicle crime. While some vehicles are stolen as a crime of opportunity, many are stolen by complex, professional theft rings whose tactics often involve violence, financial fraud, identity theft, and international trafficking. Over the last year, we saw crime sprees begin with the theft of a vehicle, leading to the dangerous and costly ripple effect of the subsequent crimes and serious, sometimes deadly threats to drivers.

You can be certain of our continued diligence in reducing the peril to our collective safety and security that vehicle crimes pose. We will continue to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth, support our grantees, educate the public, and train law enforcement to detect and solve these ever-evolving crimes. We are grateful for the opportunity, and we thank you for your support.

\*According to FBI Uniform Crime Reporting and Pennsylvania State Police — FBI theft rates are only available through 2020 at the time of publication.

LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR 02.



Respectfully,

Ronald W. Kosh  
Chairperson

### 03. WHAT IS THE PENNSYLVANIA AUTO THEFT PREVENTION AUTHORITY (ATPA)?

## **THE MISSION OF THE ATPA IS TO PREVENT, DETECT, AND PROSECUTE AUTO THEFT.**

The ATPA is a statewide network of nearly 100 highly skilled police officers, state troopers, detectives, prosecutors, paralegals, and support staff who work together to prevent, detect, and prosecute auto theft.

The General Assembly created the ATPA in 1994. Pennsylvania remains one of the only states in the country to dedicate this level of expertise and commitment to fighting vehicle theft. It's proven to be a wise investment.

Since its inception, the ATPA has reduced theft rates in Pennsylvania by 73 percent, with ATPA grantees recovering more than \$760 million in stolen vehicles and parts.

# WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT AUTO THEFT?

Auto theft and vehicle crimes impact your safety, the safety of your community, and your wallet. Whether your car is stolen or not, vehicle-related crimes affect everyone.



1. An increasing number of cars are being **stolen by force**, threatening the lives of the drivers and anyone else nearby.
2. Stolen cars are often used to commit **other violent crimes** that impact your community.
3. If you leave your mail, bills, car registration, work files, or other sensitive information in a car, you also become vulnerable to **identity theft and home burglary**.
4. When vehicles are stolen, **insurance rates increase**. We all pay the price.

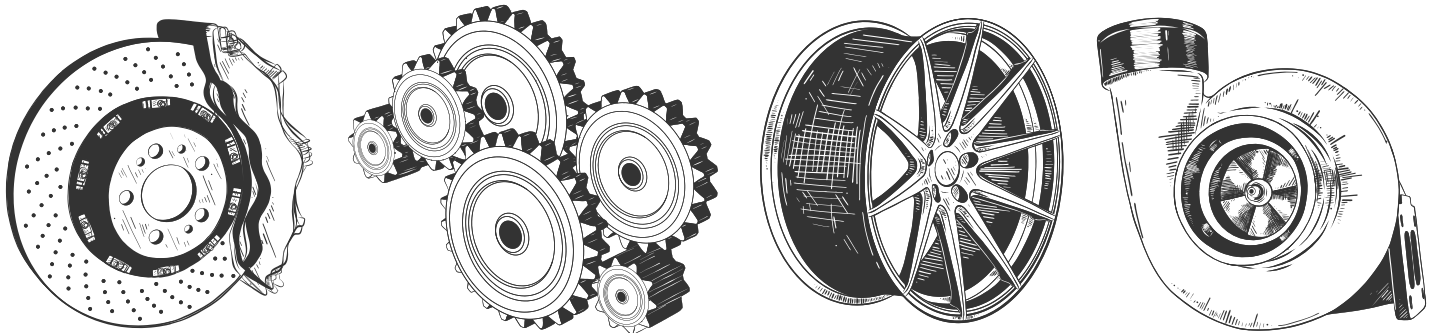
# 05. FUNDING & SKILLS

## FUNDING.

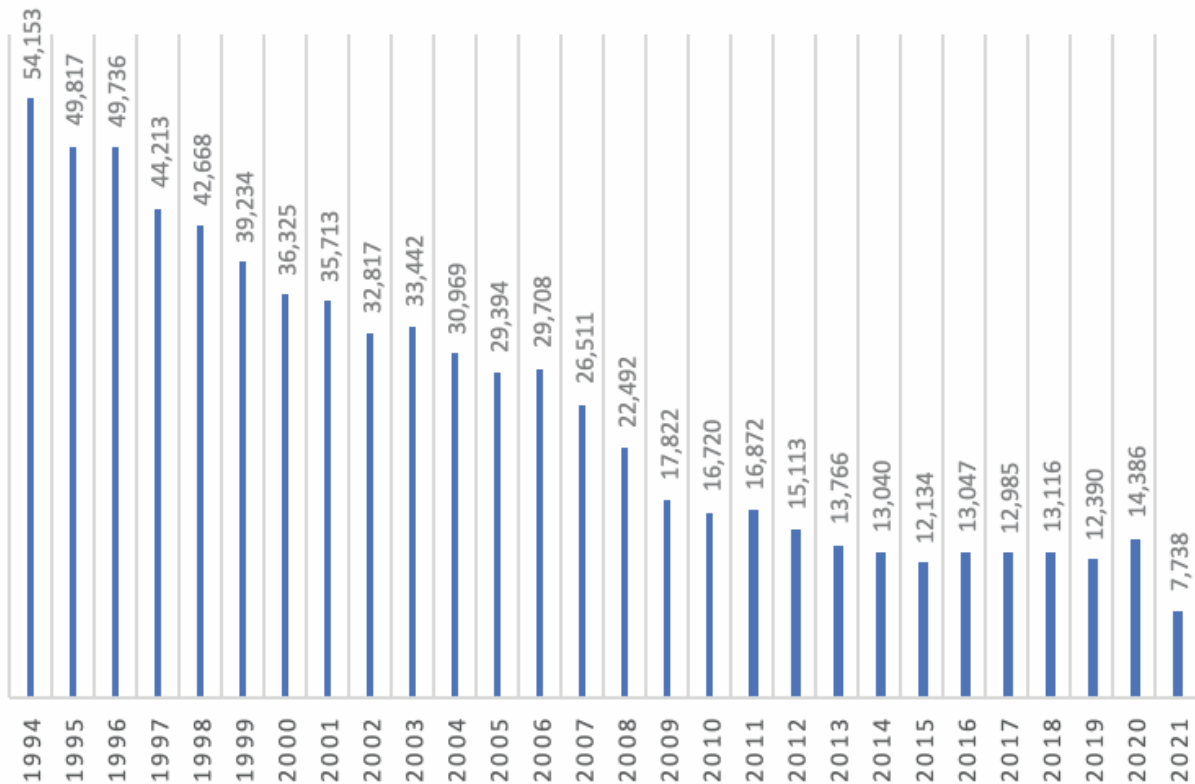
**We do not use tax dollars.** Our funds come from an annual assessment of 343 insurance companies that insure Pennsylvania drivers. The funding provides grants to investigative and/or prosecutorial units statewide, including the Pennsylvania State Police, regional task forces, district attorneys, police departments, and public information campaigns. Our team consists of a board of directors, an executive director, and a grants analyst. An effective steward of the insurance industry assessments, our organization uses only 4.6 percent of its funds for administrative costs. The funds are devoted to investigation, prosecution, equipment, training, public awareness, and prevention. **For every dollar assessed, we have realized a \$6.40 return on that investment in reduced theft rates and recovered vehicles and parts.**

## SPECIALIZED SKILLS.

Theft is only one aspect of vehicle crime. Pennsylvania ATPA grantees have specialized skills. They know how to detect and solve crimes that range from title washing to insurance fraud to cargo theft to VIN alteration to odometer fraud to carjacking and more. Many violent crime sprees often start with the theft of a vehicle. Only investigators and prosecutors with unique training and experience can keep this wide range of thieves and schemes at bay.



# PENNSYLVANIA MOTOR VEHICLE THEFTS\*\*



\*\*Per Federal UCR through 2019. Per PA UCR as of 2020. Current year is not considered final.

PENNSYLVANIA MOTOR VEHICLE  
**THEFTS**

1994

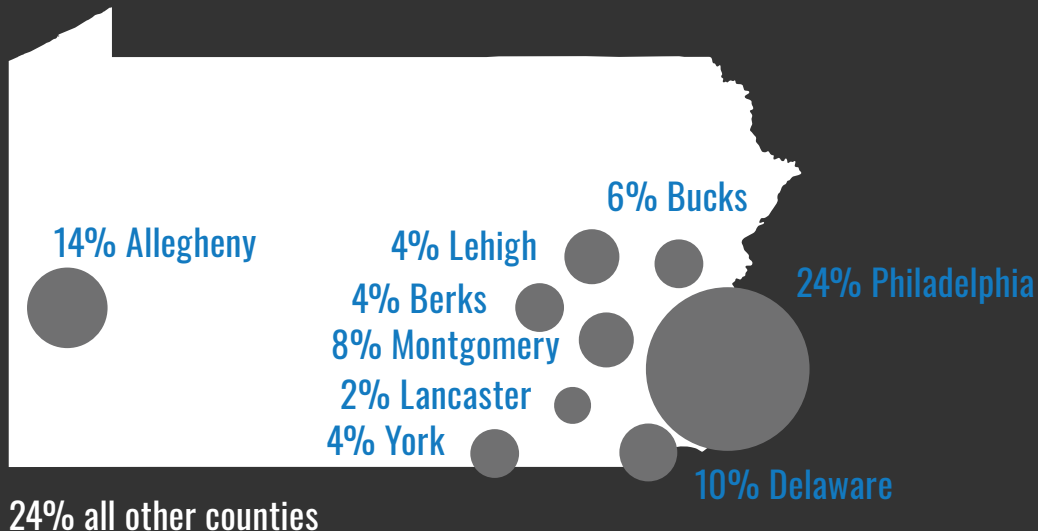
**54,153**

2021

**7,738**

AS OF 3/15/2022

**AUTO THEFTS BY COUNTY**





08. GRANTEES

# 2021 GRANTEES

**OUR GRANTEES  
SHARE AN  
IMPRESSIVE  
COMMITMENT TO**

**OUR  
MISSION**

In 2021, ATPA grantees made 383 arrests, convicted 594 thieves, and recovered \$46.6 million in vehicles, parts, and restitution.

Pennsylvania ATPA grantees span the state and are awarded funds following an application and board vote. Funds are awarded based on need and on the grantee's plan for how the funds will be used. Grant renewals are contingent upon audits and results.

Many municipalities have slashed their police department and law enforcement budgets, making this support more important than ever. Grant monies may be used to cover salaries for detectives, prosecutors, and specialized support staff, as well as training and equipment.

In some cases, law enforcement agencies contribute matching resources. In other cases, ATPA funds cover overtime costs to expand the capacity of the team. Funding models serve to multiply resources and streamline our investigative-prosecutorial approach.



## PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE (PSP)

- 14 detectives from county and municipal police departments across the state (fully funded)
- 17 state troopers (overtime only and equipment only)
- 4 state police supervisors (overtime and equipment only)
- 1 clerk (fully funded)

## POLICE DEPARTMENTS

### PHILADELPHIA POLICE

- 4 police officers (fully funded)
- 8 detectives (fully funded)
- 6 division detectives (overtime only)
- Major Crimes Auto Squad (overtime only)
- Tow Squad (overtime only)

### PITTSBURGH POLICE

- 2 detectives (fully funded)
- 2 detectives (partial overtime and expenses)

### LANCASTER CITY POLICE

- 2 detectives (fully funded)
- 1 assistant district attorney (50% funded)
- 1 sergeant (50% funded)

### ERIE POLICE

- 1 detective (fully funded)

# DISTRICT ATTORNEY OFFICES

## ALLEGHENY COUNTY

- 1 assistant DA (fully funded)
- 1 paralegal (fully funded)

## DELAWARE COUNTY

- 1 deputy DA (50% funded)
- 1 detective (fully funded)
- 1 analyst (50% funded)
- Overtime for assisting officers

## PHILADELPHIA

- 2 assistant DAs (1 fully funded, 1 at 50%)
- 1 SIU paralegal (fully funded)
- 1 investigator (fully funded)

## LACKAWANNA COUNTY\*\*\*

- 1 assistant DA (50% funded)
- 1 part-time detective from the local police department
- 1 secretary (50% funded)

## BUCKS COUNTY

- 1 deputy DA (fully funded)
- 2 assistant DAs (fully funded)

## LEHIGH COUNTY

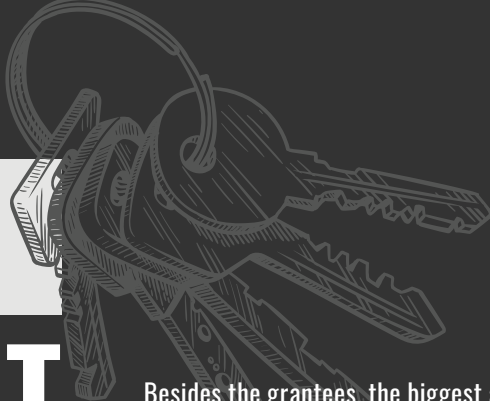
- 1 chief deputy DA (50% funded)
- 1 secretary (50% funded)
- 4 detectives from local police departments (fully funded)

\*\*\*Serves 11 counties: Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming



PART OF  
OUR MISSION

# PREVENT VEHICLE CRIME



Besides the grantees, the biggest allies in this effort are Pennsylvania drivers themselves. The simple habit of **locking the car and taking the keys with you** will significantly reduce the likelihood of having a car stolen. While this may sound like common sense, the data indicates that it's not common practice. ATPA grantees report that more than 50 percent of the state's stolen cars were left unlocked and/or with the keys inside.

We continue to spread a simple, clear prevention message across the state while also focusing on our highest crime areas.

## “GREAT GASOLINE GIVEAWAY”

A “puffer” is a car left running, unlocked, and unattended. It's the easiest and most opportunistic way to steal a car. While puffer thefts are clearly preventable, they remain a persistent problem. Drivers often leave their cars alone to warm up or cool down. They may feel safe leaving them running and unattended “for just a minute,” but they are putting their vehicles and their community in jeopardy.





We see the highest number of these types of thefts in and around Philadelphia, the area in the Commonwealth where vehicle crime is highest. Our annual “Great Gasoline Giveaway” campaign placed our prevention messages where drivers routinely saw them — at gas stations, on social media channels, and on wrapped vehicles in the greater Philadelphia area. Weekly and monthly “Great Gasoline Giveaway” winners received gas gift cards, and the grand prize winner won a year’s supply of free gas.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ADS



# A PUFFER IS A CAR LEFT RUNNING, UNLOCKED, AND UNATTENDED.

PUFFERS ARE QUICKLY AND EASILY STOLEN.

#NoPuffers | nopuffers.com



Leaving your car puffing makes it vulnerable to theft. But puffer theft is easy to avoid! At the mini-mart, liquor store, at work, or in your driveway, protect your ride.

**LOCK YOUR CAR. TAKE YOUR KEYS. EVERY TIME.**



## “GONE IN A PUFF” CAMPAIGN.

We also produced three new video spots to educate viewers. Each video plot was inspired by a story from the 2020 ATPA Annual Report and appeared on social media and YouTube and in email marketing. Overall, the campaign reached nearly two million Facebook users and four million Twitter users. It also delivered millions of impressions to people encountering our messaging through our wrapped vehicles, at gas stations, and on the road.

## 15. TRAINING OVERVIEW



# AUTO THEFT AFFECTS EVERYONE

7,738 vehicles were stolen in Pennsylvania in 2021. Even without experiencing theft firsthand, insurance rates and violence associated with vehicle crimes affect all of us.



# TRAINING & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Auto theft is complex and ever-evolving. Unique training and skills are required to stay current on theft trends and technology; therefore, patrol officers and prosecutors must be trained on the most current information regarding stolen vehicles, identity theft rings, and prosecution for auto theft cases. ATPA grantees both receive and provide specialized training throughout the year.

## FOR GRANTEES

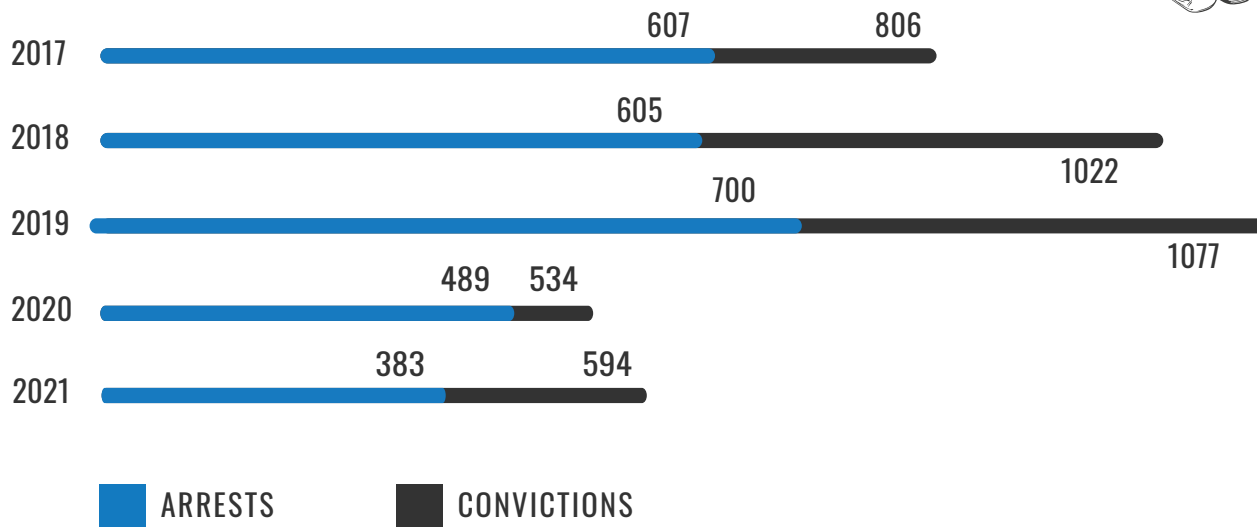
This year, we partnered with the Northeast Regional Chapter of the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators (IAATI) to present monthly intelligence briefings and seminars on theft detection, vehicle finance fraud, and other topics. Due to the pandemic, the sessions were offered via videoconference. Topics included electronic investigations and surveillance, wiretapping, document fraud, and more.

## BY GRANTEES

Chemically etching the vehicle identification number (VIN) onto all vehicle windows deters auto theft, as perpetrators would need to replace all of a vehicle's glass before trying to sell it. The Lehigh County Auto Theft Task Force and the Bucks County District Attorney's office each held VIN etchings this year.

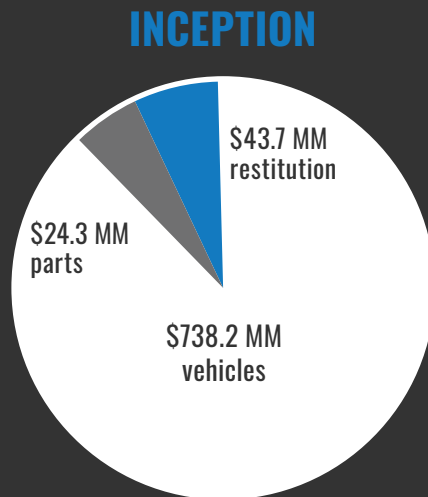
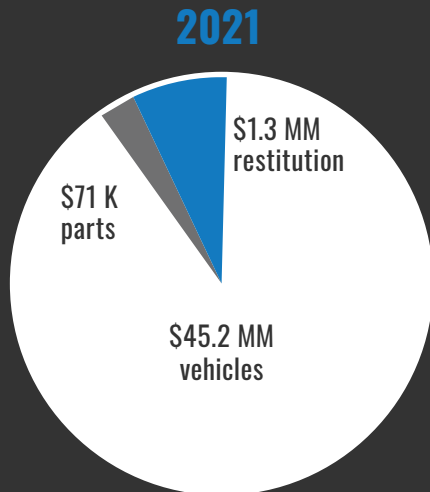


## INDIVIDUALS **ARRESTED** AND CONVICTED



# VALUE OF RECOVERIES

**\$6.40**  
**RETURN**  
ON INVESTMENT SINCE INCEPTION



TOTAL VALUE OF RECOVERED VEHICLES  
AND PARTS SINCE INCEPTION IN 1994

**\$762.5** MILLION

### STOLEN CARS USED TO COMMIT OTHER CRIMES

#### **TWO STOLEN VEHICLES AND A ROBBERY**

Stolen cars are frequently used to commit other (often violent) crimes. In this case, the defendant committed a slew of crimes in one evening. His first act was breaking into a car dealership, stealing the keys to a 2014 Dodge Caravan, and driving the vehicle to another dealership where he stole a 2011 Volkswagen Tiguan. Leaving the Dodge Caravan at this second dealership, he drove the Tiguan to a pharmacy, which he robbed. The defendant was stopped when neighbors spotted him running away. Before being taken into custody, the defendant threatened the officers on the scene. He ultimately pleaded guilty to multiple felonies and was sentenced to one to two years of incarceration for each auto theft, amongst other charges to run concurrently, in addition to a third sentence for the robbery. He was also ordered to pay \$1,300 in restitution and undergo a mental health evaluation and a drug & alcohol evaluation.



## **STOLEN HONDA ACCORD BECOMES THE GETAWAY CAR FOR A STRING OF RETAIL THEFTS**

It was early April when the owner of a Honda Accord left his keys in the car. Someone walking by noticed the keys in the unattended vehicle and quickly drove the car away. More than three weeks later, Warrington Police apprehended a man stealing merchandise from a pharmacy. Awaiting him in the parking lot was his getaway car: the stolen Honda Accord (which was also full of merchandise the defendant stole from another store earlier in the day). The individual and the accomplice who stole the vehicle pleaded guilty to vehicle theft-related offenses and theft by receiving stolen property and criminal conspiracy to commit theft by receiving stolen property. One defendant received 21 to 48 months of incarceration and a consecutive three years of probation for stealing the Honda Accord and for his involvement in the retail thefts. The individual caught committing the retail theft was sentenced to 192 days to 23 months of incarceration at the Bucks County Correctional Facility and 24 months of probation. He was also ordered to continue his drug and alcohol treatment.



## CATALYTIC CONVERTER THEFTS

### **DRIVER OF A RANGE ROVER CAUGHT STEALING CATALYTIC CONVERTERS**

It takes only minutes to steal a vehicle, but it also takes mere moments to remove a catalytic converter from the undercarriage of a car. That defendant was using this short time frame to his advantage when he pulled his Range Rover next to parked vehicles, crawled underneath the cars, and quickly removed and drove away with their catalytic converters. Two separate onlookers reported him to the police. While attempting to steal a third catalytic converter, the defendant was startled by an unmarked police car before being arrested by officers with the Philadelphia Police Department. Repair shops were able to match the cuts on the converter to the victim's vehicle. The defendant was charged with criminal mischief and theft by unlawful taking. In early 2022, the defendant entered a guilty plea, with nine months of probation.

# PUFFERS

## VICTIM'S CAR STOLEN TWICE IN ONE WEEK

The victim was already having a bad week when her 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee was stolen from outside of her home. It had been left unlocked, with the spare keys inside. Feeling emboldened and in need of her car, she went out in search of her vehicle. By a stroke of luck, she found her car left unattended, but whoever had stolen it took her spare keys. A group of men was barbecuing nearby, and she asked if they knew anything about how her car had gotten there. They denied knowing anything, and she drove her car back home, hoping the ordeal was behind her, but noticed someone had connected their phone to her Bluetooth when they had stolen the car. A few days later, her car was stolen again, and she once again went out to look for it. She found her car parked in front of a residence. Feeling emboldened again, she went up to the door to demand her vehicle and keys. A woman answered the door and explained that the man who had stolen her car had just fled but gave the victim his name and showed her a picture of him on social media. The victim didn't give up there. She recognized one of the men in the photos; he had been at the barbecue. She went back to that spot and found the man again. As a result of their conversation, he called his friend who had stolen her car and retrieved her spare keys. She drove away with her car and spare keys, but her vehicle had sustained significant damage. The 18-year-old defendant was arrested by the Pittsburgh Police Department, pleaded guilty to a felony and misdemeanor, and was ordered to pay restitution of more than \$19,000. He was also sentenced to three to six months of incarceration, followed by three years of probation. Note: You should not confront alleged thieves; instead, immediately contact your local law enforcement agency.



## **FAST, STOLEN CAR SUMMER**

It was a hot July day when the victim noticed that his vehicle was no longer in the driveway where he had left it. He immediately called the Whitehall Police Department to report his car missing. The car had been unlocked, with the keys in the center console. The stolen vehicle was located just over a month later after it was involved in a vehicle pursuit. Traveling at speeds greater than 90–100 mph, the driver had lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a tree. Police found that he did not have a valid driver's license and that he was in possession of 9 grams of marijuana and \$650 in cash at the time of arrest.

## **THE LOCKSMITH WHO LEFT HIS CAR UNLOCKED**

A locksmith made a quick stop to help a customer get back into their car — a stop so quick he left his own car running, unlocked, with the keys and one of his cell phones inside. While focused on his customer's car, he did not see someone jump into his vehicle and drive off. Thinking quickly, the locksmith tracked the cell phone left inside the vehicle and called the Allentown Police Department. The defendant was charged with theft of unlawful taking, receiving stolen property, and unauthorized use of automobiles.





## **CAR THIEF PREYS ON CONVENIENCE STORES TO FIND PUFFERS TO STEAL**

Two different drivers had their cars stolen by the same individual on two consecutive days. Both drivers made the mistake of leaving their cars puffing: running, unattended, and unlocked, with the keys inside. The first car was stolen from a Lehigh County convenience store. The next day, the defendant crashed and abandoned that vehicle in Montgomery County and proceeded on foot to a gas station in Hilltown where he stole the second vehicle. Responding officers alerted the surrounding departments, and the defendant was stopped by Quakertown Borough Police. The defendant pleaded guilty to two counts of theft by unlawful taking and related charges in a single prosecution in Bucks County in coordination with the Auto Theft Task Forces from Bucks County and Lehigh County. Remember: Even if running in for a quick cup of coffee, lock your car and take your keys — every time.



# FINANCIAL

## Fiscal year 2020 - 2021

Assessments	7,600,000
Interest earned	4,455
Total revenue	7,604,455
Balance carried over from prior year	9,253,201
Total funds available	<b>16,857,656</b>

### Program expenses

Grants paid	(6,209,751)
Grant reviews	(70,656)
Public awareness	(226,394)
Training	(4,020)
Total	<b>(6,510,821)</b>

### Operating expenses

Personnel expenses	(238,455)
Operating expenses	(113,991)
Total	<b>(352,446)</b>

Net effect of balance sheet changes	(1,388,630)
-------------------------------------	-------------

Year-end balance:	<b>8,605,759</b>
(to be applied to future grants and operational expenditures)	

The ATPA operated at 4.6% of the total assessments collected.



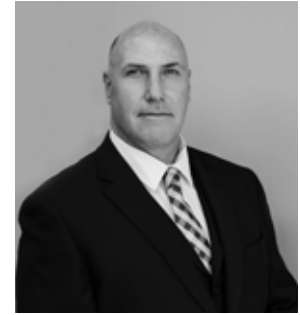
**Ronald W. Kosh**  
Chairperson



**Celeste C. Dodson**  
Secretary  
Claims Manager — SIU,  
State Farm Insurance



**Scott P. Sherry**  
Treasurer  
Associate Vice President  
Personal Lines Claims - Field,  
Nationwide



**Robert G. LaBar**  
Chief Deputy Attorney General,  
Insurance Fraud Section,  
Office of Attorney General



**Frank J. Noonan**  
Retired Pennsylvania State  
Police Commissioner



**Frank E. Pawlowski**  
Retired Pennsylvania State  
Police Commissioner

## STAFF

**Steven R. Wheeler** | Executive Director

**Alissa Temperine** | Grants Analyst



**theAUTHORITY**  
Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority

5 Kacey Court, Suite 201  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055  
[watchyourcar.org](http://watchyourcar.org) | 1-888-777-ATPA

