



National District Attorneys Association
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February 28th, 2022

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C., 20002

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C., 20002

Dear Chairman Durbin & Ranking Member Grassley,

I am reaching out on behalf of the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), the oldest and largest national organization representing state and local prosecutors in the country. With more than 5,000 members nationwide, NDAA is recognized as the leading source of national expertise on the prosecution function and is a valuable resource for the media, academia, government, and community leaders. Today, I write in response and in support of the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing on *Federal Support for Preventing and Responding to Carjackings*.

As you know, there has been an alarming increase in violent crimes committed by both adults and juveniles across the country. Of particular concern has been the unprecedented rise in armed carjackings committed by juveniles, some as young as 12 or 13. A review of recent cases, along with conversations with law enforcement, prosecutors and other experts in the field, reveals that there has been a confluence of factors that are contributing to this rise. Prosecutors are uniquely positioned to address this recent increase in crime and assist policymakers in ensuring we address this growing problem.

NDAA understands that myriad factors are contributing to the rise in carjackings committed by juveniles, the most profound impact stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating impact it has had in schools and in juvenile justice systems across the country. The lockdowns caused many states to close schools and move to a virtual learning environment. The lack of day-to-day structure and oversight has resulted in youth spending less time in school settings and more time unsupervised on the streets and on social media.

The impact of the pandemic on the juvenile justice system has been even more dramatic. The shutdown brought normal court processing to a standstill. Many prosecutors could not respond effectively to juvenile offending, even cases of serious crimes, and most community programming was discontinued. However, these challenges present opportunities for the law enforcement, business, and advocacy communities to work together in identifying potential risk factors, providing increased opportunities for struggling youth, and ensuring proper enforcement of any laws that are broken.

Responding to this new crisis requires a comprehensive approach which begins, as both Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley have noted, with improved data collection by

our partners at the Department of Justice and Department of Transportation. Further, law enforcement can be assisted by our partners in the business community when attempting to locate stolen vehicles. As the Senate Judiciary Committee noted in a letter to the automotive industry, the speed in which law enforcement can locate a stolen vehicle plays an important role in ensuring the property is returned and offenders are held accountable.

These requests by the leadership of the Senate Judiciary Committee are important in combatting carjackings throughout the country. NDAA has also identified in its recent article, [*What's Behind the Rise in Juvenile Carjackings? What Can We Do About It?*](#), additional steps that can be taken to reduce this concerning increase in crime. Specifically, jurisdictions should continue prioritizing their resources on these cases and establishing special task forces to share information and collaborate. Accompanying these efforts should be clear messages sent to the community that these crimes will not be tolerated. Further, the juvenile justice system should work with community partners to educate youth about the dangers of engaging in carjackings and the consequences that will follow. Finally, law enforcement should work in partnership with juvenile advocates to assist in identifying potential risk factors for troubled youth in a community and providing resources and programming to assist those individuals in leading a productive lifestyle.

The Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing on *Federal Support for Preventing and Responding to Carjackings* is an important first step in identifying the challenges facing our communities and working together on a comprehensive solution that promotes public safety. We thank you for your tireless efforts to improve the criminal justice system and look forward to working alongside you and your staff to ensure law enforcement and advocates have the tools needed to end this recent rise in carjackings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Billy West". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Billy West
NDAA President