



David A. Clarke Jr.
Sheriff

Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office

NEWS RELEASE

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Sheriff's Statement on Rash of Car Thefts

Milwaukee, WI – Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr. issued the following statement on the rash of cars stolen while owners warm up their cars in the frigid temperatures:

The quality of life in Milwaukee has deteriorated to the point where we now blame the victims for car theft. On cold, frigid days, if you live outside Milwaukee you are able to start your car to let it warm up and go back into the house before you leave for work or load the kids inside to take them to school or daycare. People living outside of the city of Milwaukee enjoy that lifestyle. In Milwaukee, we expect residents to drive around in a frozen car, or sit inside and freeze your ass off while it warms up, or dig into their pockets for several hundred dollars to get a remote start.

No outlying suburban community is experiencing this criminal surge on cold days. Milwaukee officials have given in to the car thief, and instead of telling them that prison will result if they steal cars, we lecture law-abiding citizens on what they need to do instead. This is backwards. People and businesses, not wanting to continually alter their behavior because of crime, leave Milwaukee. I do not blame them. It is a quality of life issue.

The reason car theft is high in Milwaukee is the refusal of prosecutors and judges in the Milwaukee criminal justice system to crack down on perpetrators of car theft. Even the language used to refer to it is a capitulation to the crook. It is no longer called "car theft," it is called "take and drive." Criminal justice practitioners simply say "joy riding." Joy riding and take and drive applies when a teenager takes the family car out for a drive while their parents sleep, returning the car to the driveway, hopefully before mom or dad wakes up.

Milwaukee officials have capitulated to the criminal. It may be prudent not to leave your car running unattended in your driveway or in front of your house, but that is not consent for some goof to steal your car. I am not driving around in a frozen car or sitting outside while it warms up. I'll move to a safer city first.

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Let me make this clear, car theft is a felonious act and needs to be treated as such so criminals know we will aggressively go after it with prison time, not probation or House of Correction time.

Auto theft is a gateway crime into most young criminals' paths to a criminal lifestyle. They learn early on how soft the justice system treats them and they correctly assess that crime pays, so they repeat the behavior, usually with more serious acts.

I have a different attitude on car theft. It isn't just a nuisance or low-level crime. When you steal someone's car, they can't drive to work, take the kids to school or daycare, go to the doctor for an appointment, or go to the grocery store, and it drives up car insurance costs for the victim.

WHAT ABOUT THE VICTIM?!

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