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District Attorney Obscuring Auto Theft Statistics Prompts Board Action

(Orange County, CA) – The Orange County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a memorandum of agreement to support the Orange County Auto Theft Taskforce (OCATT) with \$1.75 million in funding from vehicle registration fees over the next five years. Direction from Supervisor Todd Spitzer on the amended agenda item included a full report in 90 days from the OCATT to determine the true scope of vehicle theft throughout Orange County after the misleading District Attorney staff report highlighted only a one-year slight decrease in auto thefts when statistics show an increase of more than 27% the previous year.

“Property crime in Orange County is up sharply over the last three years and auto theft in particular has seen a dramatic rise. I was surprised the District Attorney’s staff report on the item stated only statistics showing a slight decrease in 2016 while ignoring the previous years when crime statistics show a significant spike in stolen cars,” Supervisor Spitzer said. “Promoting the one-year decrease, apparently for a positive reflection, is incredibly misleading and the public deserves better.”

Auto theft continues to be a significant problem in Orange County. The December 5th meeting staff report (agenda item 28) from the OC District Attorney’s office states, “Vehicle theft is the most costly property crime in the United States. Auto theft results in monetary losses to victims, funds organized crime/gangs, contributes to violent crimes and affects auto insurance costs for the driving public. Combined efforts of California law enforcement agencies, and the hard work of the multi-jurisdictional vehicle theft task forces like Orange County Auto Theft Task Force (OCATT), coupled with prevention efforts by the public and vehicle manufacturers, have contributed to the decrease in the number of vehicle thefts statewide over the previous years.”

The DA staff report highlighted a 4.3% decrease in county auto thefts from 2015 to 2016, the

last full year for which statistics are available. Statistics provided by the OC Sheriff's Department show auto theft in contract cities and unincorporated areas of the county has risen more than 19% from 2013 through the first ten months of this year. Some of the astonishing numbers include a 63% rise in Laguna Niguel, 43% rise in Lake Forest, 35% rise in Mission Viejo and a 47% increase in unincorporated areas.

A closer examination shows a remarkable spike in auto thefts just two years ago. According to the California Department of Justice, there were 2,372 more cars stolen throughout the County in 2015 than the year before (8,670 to 6,298), a one-year increase of more than 27%. Statistics provided by the American Automobile Association (AAA) show their insured member auto thefts in OC rose 34% from to 2014 to 2015.

Currently, the task force includes representatives from nine cities in addition to the OC Sheriff's Department and the California Highway Patrol. Supervisor Spitzer's goal is to have all cities in the County participate in to the taskforce and work cohesively to disrupt the rising trend in auto thefts with transparency in reporting crime statistics.

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