



DEAN PRESTON

September 14, 2023

Chief William Scott, San Francisco Police Department
District Attorney Brooke Jenkins, San Francisco District Attorney
Director Jeffrey Tumlin, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
General Manager Phil Ginsburg, Recreation & Parks Department
Director Sarah Dennis Phillips, Office of Economic and Workforce Development

Re: Car Break-Ins, Proposals in Advance of Hearing

With an average of 75 reported break-ins a day, and many unreported, there's no question that car break-ins in San Francisco are out of control. As you know, we have called for a hearing to examine the City's strategies, what's working and what isn't, and how we can collaboratively work to dramatically reduce the incidence of car break-ins in our City. The hearing will take place September 21.

Car break-ins affect not only their immediate victims, but also make neighbors feel less safe, impact San Francisco's reputation and tourism, and consume various city resources to respond to break-ins, take police reports, clear glass from our streets and sidewalks, and return items to victims when they are recovered. From our extensive interviews and research in preparation for the hearing, we are disappointed by the lack of coordinated response, which has prevented meaningful progress, or even a shared understanding, about what strategies are being deployed, what data we have, and how we are measuring success and holding ourselves accountable when it comes to this long standing problem. That said, our purpose is not to place blame for the past, but to figure out how to move forward in a more effective manner.

I am encouraged by the renewed attention on car break-ins following our announcement of a hearing on this subject on July 11th of this year. In recent weeks, we have had the opportunity to have extensive meetings with numerous departments, as well as tourist industry and car rental representatives, about current efforts and lessons learned. We are disappointed that to date the District Attorney's office has refused to meet with our office or provide any information. We hope that will change.

SFPD recently announced that it is launching a bait car program. This was proposed to SFPD in 2020 by the former District Attorney, and it remains unclear why it was not piloted until now. Regardless, we look forward to learning the impact of this approach.

We are concerned to learn that there has been no interdepartmental coordination on strategies for addressing car break-ins for many years. The last effort to bring departments together for consistent collaboration, an effort that also involved key stakeholders, was under former DA Gascon in 2016. We believe there is a serious need for interdepartmental coordination on this issue.

With regard to the rewards fund, announced in October 2021, we requested information regarding any payments from the fund and received no such information. Those who funded the rewards program are

unaware of any use of the funds. We request that any information on the program be shared with our office and the public.

We look forward to your comments on current programs and efforts at the upcoming hearing. Our research and analysis suggests that the following could be effective in addressing car break-ins. We have raised some of these suggestions with departments directly in the past, but have not seen action. These suggestions are proposals to complement, not replace, any current efforts that are effective. Please be prepared to comment on these proposals at our hearing.

1. Robust Citywide Educational and Outreach Campaign to Prevent People From Leaving Anything in Their Cars

While enforcement – especially up the food chain – is one piece of the puzzle, the San Francisco Police Department cannot solve this issue alone given the sheer number of break-ins and the low number of overall cases closed. If we want to make a noticeable dent on this issue, we need to branch out and be creative. In addition to enforcement activities, we need to attack the car break-in problem from the “supply” side and prevent car break-ins from happening in the first place. This is a crime of opportunity, and we need to remove the opportunity. Not leaving valuables in the car should become second nature, something that can be achieved by a concerted campaign akin to the 1985 “Buckle Up” campaign. The following efforts would train residents and visitors to leave nothing in their cars.

- a. Create and post a long overdue replacement for the current low-visibility, text heavy, monolingual “Park Smart” and “Prevent Theft” signs. We suggest an attention grabbing, colorful image and signage to replace or supplement current “Park Smart Signs.” These should be posted at hot spots. Attached is a draft example of what such a sign could look like, with the caveat that we are not graphic designers, but we wanted to get the conversation started. The point is to create a memorable, simple, visible image, and use it everywhere.
- b. Pilot a presence of trained ambassadors at “hot spots” to greet people as they park, hand a flyer, and verbally remind people who are parking to remove all belongings from their cars. This could be expanded if successful. This was recommended in the 2015-2016 Civil Grand Jury report and has not been implemented. We suggest this start asap.
- c. Coordinating and collaborating with car rental companies to make sure that Park Smart messaging is consistent
- d. MTA should amplify the message through stickers on parking meters, and through a text message as part of the Pay to Park app.
- e. Citywide marketing campaign. Mayor and departments to develop public service announcements, SFGTV content, radio spots, SFO signage, bus advertisements, social media toolkit, etc. to raise awareness and train people to avoid leaving anything in their cars.

2. Interdepartmental coordination

The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), the District Attorney’s office, SFMTA, Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and other departments need to work collaboratively to reduce car break-ins. Different departments have different responsibilities to help address this issue; for example: SFPD can identify hardest-hit areas to ensure that SFMTA prioritizes those areas in rolling out signage and notices; if SFPD data shows most of the break-ins target rental companies, OEWD can coordinate with the rental companies to ramp up educational campaigns for their customers; if investigations show that one small group of people is driving the issue, they can coordinate with the DA’s office for more efficient and targeted operations. There is no reason that departments need to reinvent the wheel

independently on their strategies for car break-ins, as we saw when former District Attorney Chesa Boudin had to run his own bait car operation.

We propose a **monthly interdepartmental meeting** to share information and discuss the City's approach to car break-ins and progress or impediments. Per various community stakeholders, former District Attorney George Gascon convened monthly meetings between departments and stakeholders during part of his tenure, which allowed for better coordination of resources and information. My office has been informed that this is currently not happening.

3. Consistent evaluation of tactics and results

Given that the city has limited resources to address car break-ins, we need to ensure that we use our resources strategically by adopting metrics and benchmarks for success that we can use to evaluate progress on a consistent basis.

We propose the following:

- A. **Publish specific benchmarks to define success.** In particular, we believe it is essential to set a target of reduced incidence of break-ins, such as a 10% reduction in 3 months, 20% in 6 months, or some other specific goals that should be bold but achievable.
- B. **A quarterly report** to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors including data, trends, strategies being deployed, and what's working and what isn't working to reduce car break-ins.

We look forward to your feedback on these proposals. This is in addition to, not in place of, the data and information requests our office has previously provided.

I want to reiterate that we appreciate the constructive dialogue with SFPD, MTA, RPD, and the travel and car rental representatives, as well as other stakeholders, in our efforts to prepare for this hearing. We reiterate that the SF District Attorney has not engaged, and we again request their engagement. We must all work together if we hope to make progress at long last on this vexing issue.