

219<sup>TH</sup> NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE  
SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE  
HON. NELLIE POU—CHAIR

# TESTIMONY

---

SAL RISALVATO

Executive Director

New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association



Support

June 16, 2021

## Testimony of Sal Risalvato

Chair Pou, members of the Committee, my name is Sal Risalvato, Executive Director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, Automotive Association (NJGCA), here representing hundreds of independent auto repair shops across this state, and it is on their behalf that we support this bill.

Nationwide thefts of catalytic converters have skyrocketed over the last two years, particularly since the start of the pandemic. In 2019 the National Insurance Crime Bureau recorded 3,389 thefts across the US, in 2020 it was 14,433. Even within 2020 thefts soared from 779 in April to 2,347 in December. Catalytic converters contain small amounts of the precious metals platinum, palladium, or rhodium, all of which have seen their value spike. These devices pull toxins out of the vehicle's emissions, which is particularly important in a state as dense as ours. A vehicle without a functioning catalytic converter not only pollutes significantly more, it cannot pass its biennial motor vehicle inspection. The cost to a motorist of replacing a sawed off catalytic converter can run over \$1,000, sometimes much more if the criminal was sloppy in their theft and damaged other vehicle components.

Part of the reason there has been such a sharp increase in thefts is that it can be a fairly simple crime to commit. Someone who knows what they are doing can sneak under the car, saw off the converter, and be back in their getaway car in under two minutes. The converters can then be taken to a recycler for cash. This bill will raise the amount of effort it will take to sell these devices (such as by transporting them to another state without a law such as this), and in doing so I expect it will dissuade criminals from viewing these thefts as a way to earn a quick buck.

Our members are also concerned about this increase in thefts for fear that their business and the customers' cars parked on their lots will be targeted as well. While I have not heard of this happening in New Jersey, there have been car dealerships and even lots of government-owned vehicles that have been targeted by thieves in other states.

I am particularly thankful to the sponsor, Sen. Cunningham, for drafting legislation that will crack down on this very real problem without significantly complicating and burdening the lives of the state's independent auto repairers. The hundreds of small business owners in the auto repair trade are always struggling to keep their doors open in a competitive marketplace, and do so with only a handful of employees. A dramatic increase in paperwork requirements to perform basic repairs would hurt them just as they are still trying to recover from the declines in business they saw during last year's pandemic shutdowns. I do not expect it to be difficult for repairers to prove to recyclers that they are selling used converters on behalf of an authentic shop, for many of our members a recycler comes to the business to pick up parts directly from the shop, making it clear they are who they say they are.

I ask that you support this legislation. Thank you.