

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1941

Introduced by Assembly Member Mark González

February 13, 2026

An act to add Sections 496f and 11199.6 to the Penal Code, relating to metal theft.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1941, as introduced, Mark González. Organized metal theft.

Existing law makes a person who is a dealer in or collector of junk, metals, or secondhand materials, or their agent, employee, or representative, who buys or receives any wire, cable, copper, lead, solder, mercury, iron, or brass that the person knows or reasonably should know is used by or belongs to specified entities, including a railroad, certain utility companies, or a public entity engaged in furnishing public utility service, without using due diligence to ascertain that the person selling or delivering that material has a legal right to do so, guilty of criminally receiving that property and, in addition to imprisonment, makes that act punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000.

This bill would prohibit organized metal theft, described as acting in concert with one or more persons to steal metal materials from one or more of specified materials and items, acting in concert with 2 or more persons to receive, purchase, or possess those metal materials knowing or believing it to have been stolen, acting as an agent of another to steal those metal materials as part of an organized plan to commit theft, or recruiting, coordinating, organizing, supervising, directing, managing, or financing another to undertake acts of theft of metal. The bill would make a violation of organized metal theft punishable as either a

misdemeanor or a felony. The bill would make related findings and declarations and state the intent of the Legislature. By creating new crimes, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

Existing law encourages local law enforcement agencies to report thefts of commodity metals that have occurred within their jurisdiction to a specified privately maintained theft alert system to ensure that persons using the system receive timely and thorough information regarding metal thefts.

This bill would authorize local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities to provide information about theft of commodity metals to the Department of Justice and would require the department to make this information available to such local law enforcement agencies, public agencies, and private entities.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: yes.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:
- 2 (a) California is facing a statewide surge in organized metal
- 3 theft, particularly involving copper wire and other high-value
- 4 metals used in public infrastructure, communication networks, and
- 5 utility systems.
- 6 (b) Driven by soaring global copper prices and gaps in
- 7 enforcement and regulation, criminals have increasingly targeted
- 8 essential public assets, including streetlights, bridges, rail systems,
- 9 telecommunications lines, and electrical infrastructure, to strip and
- 10 resell stolen metal for profit.
- 11 (c) This epidemic of metal theft has caused widespread public
- 12 safety hazards, power outages, and costly disruptions to critical
- 13 infrastructure. The resulting repair costs are borne by taxpayers
- 14 and local agencies, often exceeding millions of dollars for damage
- 15 that yields thieves only a fraction of that amount in illicit sales.
- 16 (d) Recent incidents illustrate the scope and severity of the
- 17 problem across California:

1 (1) In Los Angeles, copper wire theft has repeatedly plunged
2 entire neighborhoods and landmarks, including the Sixth Street
3 Viaduct known as the “Ribbon of Light,” into darkness with repair
4 costs exceeding \$2,500,000 and thousands of feet of wire stolen
5 in broad daylight.

6 (2) The Los Angeles Bureau of Street Lighting has reported
7 unprecedented levels of streetlight outages, with nearly 46,000
8 service requests in 2024, of which approximately 40 percent were
9 theft related.

10 (3) Telecommunications providers, including Frontier, have
11 been forced to suspend service to residents due to repeated copper
12 theft cutting off access to 911 emergency systems and leaving
13 seniors and vulnerable populations without reliable communication.

14 (4) In northern California, copper theft has caused power outages
15 severe enough to close public schools and disrupt essential services.

16 (e) Law enforcement agencies have made arrests and seized
17 tens of thousands of pounds of stolen copper. Despite these efforts,
18 organized theft rings and unscrupulous recyclers continue to profit
19 from the resale of stolen metal, often exploiting loopholes in
20 existing laws and insufficient oversight of scrap metal transactions.

21 (f) The financial burden of repairing damaged infrastructure
22 continues to escalate. Municipalities have been forced to divert
23 scarce public resources and propose increased property assessments
24 to fund streetlight repairs and security improvements.

25 (g) Metal theft undermines public safety by darkening streets,
26 disabling traffic signals, and jeopardizing emergency
27 communications and thus creates conditions that endanger
28 residents, first responders, and essential workers.

29 (h) The Legislature recognizes that, while local task forces and
30 ordinances have been established to combat this growing threat,
31 a coordinated statewide response is necessary to deter theft,
32 strengthen penalties for organized operations, and enhance
33 accountability for metal recyclers and dealers who knowingly
34 purchase stolen materials.

35 (i) It is the intent of the Legislature to support local governments
36 and law enforcement agencies through enhanced coordination and
37 penalties targeting organized theft networks and protect public
38 infrastructure, utilities, and community safety from the escalating
39 economic and social harms caused by metal theft.

40 SEC. 2. Section 496f is added to the Penal Code, to read:

1 496f. (a) A person who commits any of the following acts is
2 guilty of organized metal theft and shall be punished pursuant to
3 subdivision (b):

4 (1) Acts in concert with one or more persons to steal metal
5 materials from one or more of the items described in subdivision
6 (a) of Section 496a or subdivision (a) of Section 496e.

7 (2) Acts in concert with two or more persons to receive,
8 purchase, or possess metal materials described in subdivision (a)
9 of Section 496a or subdivision (a) of Section 496e knowing or
10 believing it to have been stolen.

11 (3) Acts as an agent of another individual or group of individuals
12 to steal metal materials described in subdivision (a) of Section
13 496a or subdivision (a) of Section 496e as part of an organized
14 plan to commit metal theft.

15 (4) Recruits, coordinates, organizes, supervises, directs,
16 manages, or finances another to undertake any of the acts described
17 in paragraph (1) or (2) or any other statute defining theft of metal.

18 (b) Organized metal theft is punishable as follows:

19 (1) If violations of paragraph (1), (2), or (3) of subdivision (a)
20 are committed on two or more separate occasions within a
21 12-month period, and if the aggregated value of the metal stolen,
22 received, purchased, or possessed within that 12-month period
23 exceeds nine hundred fifty dollars (\$950), the offense is punishable
24 by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or
25 pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170.

26 (2) Any other violation of paragraph (1), (2), or (3) of
27 subdivision (a) that is not described in paragraph (1) of this
28 subdivision is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail not
29 exceeding one year.

30 (3) A violation of paragraph (4) of subdivision (a) is punishable
31 by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year or
32 pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170.

33 (c) For the purpose of determining whether the defendant acted
34 in concert with another person or persons in any proceeding, the
35 trier of fact may consider any competent evidence, including, but
36 not limited to, all of the following:

37 (1) The defendant has previously acted in concert with another
38 person or persons in committing acts constituting theft, or any
39 related offense, including any conduct that occurred in counties
40 other than the county of the current offense, if relevant to

1 demonstrate a fact other than the defendant’s disposition to commit
2 the act.

3 (2) That the defendant used or possessed an artifice, instrument,
4 container, device, or other article capable of facilitating the removal
5 of metal from materials described in subdivision (a) of Section
6 496a or subdivision (a) of Section 496e without permission or
7 authorization and use of the artifice, instrument, container, or
8 device or other article is part of an organized plan to commit metal
9 theft.

10 (3) The property involved in the offense is of a type or quantity
11 that would not normally be collected or purchased for personal
12 use, and the property is intended for resale.

13 (d) In a prosecution under this section, the prosecutor shall not
14 be required to charge any other coparticipant of the organized
15 metal theft.

16 (e) This section does not preclude or prohibit prosecution
17 pursuant to Section 594 or charging an enhancement pursuant to
18 Sections 12022.6 or 12022.65.

19 SEC. 3. Section 11199.6 is added to the Penal Code,
20 immediately following Section 11199.5, to read:

21 11199.6. Local law enforcement agencies, public agencies,
22 and private entities, including, but not limited to,
23 telecommunication companies, recycling companies, and private
24 utility companies, may provide information about theft of
25 commodity metals, including, but not limited to, ferrous metal,
26 copper, brass, aluminum, nickel, stainless steel, and alloys, to the
27 Department of Justice. The department shall make this information
28 available to such local law enforcement agencies, public agencies,
29 and private entities.

30 SEC. 4. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to
31 Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because
32 the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school
33 district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or
34 infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty
35 for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of
36 the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within
37 the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California
38 Constitution.

O