

NEWS



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN FRITCHEY

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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Stiffer Penalties Proposed for Gas Tank Bandits *Legislation would make fuel thefts from autos a felony*

Chicago – With thefts of gasoline from automobile gas tanks on the rise around the country as the result of skyrocketing fuel prices, Rep. Fritchey (D-11) today announced that he has filed legislation to increase the penalty for theft of motor fuel from a vehicle to a Class 4 felony. House Bill 6667 would create a distinction for the theft of gasoline from a vehicle and increase the penalty associated with the crime.

Rep. Fritchey said he was inspired to draft the bill after learning that the gas had been siphoned out of the car belonging to his Chief of Staff, Les Kniskern. Currently, fuel theft from a vehicle is treated the same as other types of theft under the Illinois Criminal Code, punishable as a Class A misdemeanor, usually resulting in a fine. Rep. Fritchey's legislation would provide for potential penalties of 1-3 years of prison time.

"Stealing the gas out of somebody's car is potentially much more problematic than a random theft of property," stated Rep. Fritchey. "Not only can it result in somebody not being able to get to work or their home, but it could also result in somebody being stranded in a remote location at any hour."

Reports of gasoline thefts through the puncturing of a gas tank are also on the rise nationally. This desperate act also poses the danger of the gasoline being ignited by a spark when a hole is drilled into the tank. Rep. Fritchey stated that he hopes that the stiffer penalties provided in his bill would further act as a deterrent to potential thieves.

Rep. Fritchey's bill has already received support from organizations representing car owners. "AAA supports HB 6667 and the call for increased penalties on those who siphon gas from others' vehicles," said Brad Roeber, president of AAA Chicago. "We're hoping this bill will help those that choose to siphon gas understand that this act is more than stealing; it's endangering the safety of motorists."

While he works to advance the legislation, Rep. Fritchey recommends that car and truck owners invest in a locking gas cap as one way to protect themselves from having their gas tank siphoned.