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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

February 11, 2022

Doris James
Acting Director
Bureau of Justice Statistics
810 7th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20531

Dear Acting Director James:

I write to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to take prompt steps to improve nationwide data collection of vehicular hijacking, or carjacking, offenses. Specifically, I urge BJS to expedite consideration of including carjacking on the list of offenses that the BJS National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) tracks through data collection from individuals in households nationwide. Better data collection on carjackings will help inform prevention, investigation, and enforcement strategies and could help save lives.

The alarming increase in carjackings across the nation requires swift action. While there is no comprehensive national data currently collected on carjacking offenses, data that individual cities collect on carjacking shows a clear upward trend in recent years. For example, the Chicago Police Department reports that carjackings have increased from 736 in 2019 to 1,684 in 2020 and 2,142 last year.¹ According to CNN, carjackings in New York City have quadrupled over the last four years, and carjackings nearly quadrupled in Philadelphia from 2015 to 2021.² New Orleans saw carjackings spike from 81 in 2019 to 204 in 2020 and 210 in 2021.³ Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department reported an increase from 142 carjackings in 2019 to 360 in 2020 and 426 last year.⁴

Accurately tracking criminal offenses such as carjacking is critical to crime prevention. Law enforcement investigators and researchers are better equipped to analyze trends and patterns in criminal activity when they have access to more granular data, which facilitates finding solutions tailored to the circumstances that most commonly apply to a particular offense. Data collection of robbery, assault, and auto theft offenses does not fully capture the scope of the challenge our nation faces with carjacking, and specific collection of carjacking offense data should become a higher priority at the local, state, and federal levels.

¹ <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/vrd/home.html>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/23/us/carjackings-rise-major-cities-pandemic/index.html>

³ https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_fc38c6f6-7f04-11ec-be25-2f90bc2e24d7.html

⁴ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/20/carjacking-spike-dc-area-mirrors-violent-nationwid/>

Data collection on carjacking offenses through the BJS National Crime Victimization Survey would enhance efforts to craft policy and law enforcement responses to this crime. I am committed to working with my colleagues in Washington to craft policies that will help to combat carjackings, including advancing legislation that will remove obstacles to federally prosecuting this offense and encouraging auto industry leaders to collaborate with law enforcement on better vehicle recovery and uniform theft prevention standards. National carjacking data would enhance these and other efforts by governments, law enforcement agencies, and industry to make our communities safer from this scourge.

Accordingly, I urge you to expeditiously consider tracking carjacking in your efforts to improve the quality and utility of the NCVS. Interviewing households throughout the country to collect information on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of carjacking victimization would be an important step towards crafting effective responses to prevent carjacking.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
Chair