

# California police officers required to lock up guns after bill signed into law

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Law enforcement officers must lock up their guns left in unattended vehicles or face fines of \$1,000, under a bill signed Monday by Gov. Jerry Brown.

The new law – which had been in the works for months and puts officers in the same camp as civilians in storing weapons – came a day after a Register investigation found that at least 329 police firearms were reported lost or stolen from Southern California law enforcement agencies during the past five years.

Theft accounted for about one-third of the missing guns, and many of the thefts came because officers left weapons unattended in, or on top of, vehicles.

An earlier analysis by the Bay Area News Group, the Register's sister publications in the San Francisco Bay Area, found that 944 police guns were gone from police agencies in that region.

State Sen. Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, who authored the bill, credited the two investigations with pointing out the flaws in the system. He also said the investigations have prompted him to explore another bill next year that would force law enforcement agencies to track their missing weaponry.

There is no law requiring police agencies to audit their firearms, tracking which officers or units within a department are connected to specific guns.

"I think the public will be safer" with the increased scrutiny, Hill said Monday.

## Attorneys

Frank M. Pitre

## Practice Areas

Municipal & Public Entity  
Litigation

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“Law enforcement agencies have policies in place for officers not to leave their guns unsecured in vehicles, but they ignore it. We take that as a very serious violation of the public trust.”

Hill’s bill, SB869, closes a loophole that made police exempt to an existing law that required the public to keep weapons in locked gun boxes when left in vehicles. The weapons could also be placed in the vehicles’ locked trunks.

“The exposure that you gave the problem made it very evident this was a loophole that we needed to fill,” Hill said.

The Register analysis found that at least 108 of the missing police firearms in Southern California were stolen, many from vehicles left unlocked by seasoned police.

Glocks, Sig Sauers, Remington shotguns, rifles, even grenade launchers – all these and more were reported lost or stolen from police inventories or individual officers in Southern California.

In January, an Irvine police sergeant slipped his .45-caliber Sig Sauer into a computer bag on the passenger seat of his unlocked Chevrolet cargo van, parked in the driveway of his Laguna Niguel home, according to a sheriff’s report. He returned to find the bag gone, gun and all. The handgun was found that same night after two men ditched the bag at a gas station.

In April 2013, an Irvine reserve officer stored his service weapon in the center console of his Ford Expedition before spending the day at Shapell Park in Yorba Linda. He returned to find the gun missing. There were no signs of forced entry, which can sometimes mean the vehicle was left unlocked, according to Orange County sheriff’s officials.

In November 2015, an Orange County sheriff’s detective left her .40-caliber service Glock in an unmarked department Ford Taurus outside her home. The gun disappeared – along with two magazines. There were no signs of forced entry.

“I used to be in the Army, and we slept with our guns,” Hill said. “That’s how serious the military treats its guns. Police may not be treating their weapons as sacredly as they should.”

Ventura Police Chief Ken Corney, president of the California Association of Police Chiefs, said the new law will serve as a reminder for law enforcement officers to secure their guns safely.

“The more we can do to keep guns from being stolen, it’s an important cause,” Corney said. “There will be that extra accountability to help (officers) make the right call.”

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Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens agreed law enforcement, like the public, may get a little lax.

“I think we sometimes get the same disease as the public and think that nobody is going to break into our car,” Hutchens said. “Law enforcement should be more careful.”

The attorney for the families of Kate Steinle and Antonio Ramos – killed with guns stolen from the cars of federal agents in San Francisco – called the new law “a great first step.”

But that lawyer, Frank Pitre, also said that law enforcement agencies need to toughen the discipline officers face when they leave a weapon vulnerable to theft.

“The discipline needs to have teeth,” Pitre said. “A suspension or, when appropriate, termination. They have to make sure there are consequences, especially when someone is killed or wounded with that weapon.”... *(To read the entire article, please click [HERE](#))*