Testimony on Felony Theft Threshold

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February 7, 2020
Statute

Title 13 : Crimes And Criminal Procedure
Chapter 057 : Larceny And Embezzlement
Subchapter 001 : Larceny

(Cite as: 13 V.S.A. § 2501)

§ 2501. Grand larceny

A person who steals from the actual or constructive possession of another, other than from his or her person, money, goods, chattels, bank notes, bonds, promissory notes, bills of exchange or other bills, orders, or certificates, or a book of accounts for or concerning money, or goods due or to become due or to be delivered, or a deed or writing containing a conveyance of land, or any other valuable contract in force, or a receipt, release or defeasance, writ, process, or public record, shall be imprisoned not more than 10 years or fined not more than $5,000.00, or both, if the money or other property stolen exceeds $900.00 in value. (Amended 1971, No. 199 (Adj. Sess.), § 15; 1981, No. 223 (Adj. Sess.), § 5; 2005, No. 156 (Adj. Sess.), § 3.)
History

- The majority of states—30 and the District of Columbia—have thresholds of $1,000 or greater, 15 have set them at $500 to $950, and five have thresholds below $500.
  - TX: $2500
  - NJ: $200

- Since 2000, 39 states have raised the threshold.
  - 9 states have raised it twice

https://www.ncsl.org/documents/cj/sentencing.pdf; PEW Charitable Trust Research, 2018
Why did states raise it?

1. Inflation
   - $900 in 2020 dollars would be $1130*
   - AK has law that it must be raised every 5 years to account for inflation

2. Collateral consequences of felony convictions
   - Economic and other impacts of felony conviction
     - Reserve for most serious offenses

3. States that increased threshold experienced the same crime decline as states that did not
   - Had no impact on rate of theft
   - No impact on value of thefts

(PEW Charitable Trust, 2017)
Sample state: South Carolina

- In 2010, raised threshold from $1k to $2k
  - Lowered max. sentence for felony theft from 10 to 5 years

- Purpose was to lower prison admissions for theft—did it work?
  - Decreased prison admissions for theft by 15%
  - Shortened sentences by 13%

- Prison sentences=criminogenic
  - Poor return on investment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Felony thresholds</th>
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<td>$300</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR</td>
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<td>CA</td>
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**Source:** National Conference of State Legislatures
Resistance to raising threshold?

- Retail associations
  - They believe low threshold deters theft. But does it? No!
  - Incarceration is neutral or criminogenic but does not deter*

- There is no correlation between raising felony theft thresholds and crime rates.
- States that have raised theirs have not seen an increase in theft.

Notes: Pew used a panel fixed-effects approach to determine whether increases in state felony theft thresholds had an effect on property crime and larceny rates. The analysis found no statistically significant relationship using the standard threshold of 0.05. See the methodological notes for more information about this analysis.


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Felony Theft Values Are Unrelated to Property Crime and Larceny Rates

States report similar crime rates regardless of thresholds

- $1,500 to $2,500 (11 states): 1,833 property crime, 2,503 total crimes
- $1,000 (19 states): 1,736 property crime, 2,440 total crimes
- $200 to $950 (20 states): 1,923 property crime, 2,685 total crimes

Reported crimes per 100,000 residents in 2014

- Property crime
- Larceny
States That Raised Felony Theft Thresholds Between 2001 and 2011 Had Crime Declines Similar to Those That Did Not
All states reported sharp decreases in property crime, larceny rates

- Property crime: -35% (Threshold change states), -35% (Non-threshold change states)
- Larceny: -33% (Threshold change states), -32% (Non-threshold change states)
Figures 6Z

6Z - Vermont

Notes: Shaded areas indicate the period after each state's policy change. Old and new thresholds are shown for each state.

Conclusion

1. No negative impact
   According to PEW:
   
   “States can safely raise felony thresholds for theft offenses without disrupting downward trends in property crime.”

2. Cost savings realized by decreased incarceration

3. Saving serious penalties for more serious crimes
Data Driven Impacts

- 18 states require “data driven impact assessments” to consider legislation regarding cost and public safety.

- Cost-benefit analysis done for each proposal

- Data=
  - Statistics on who goes to prison and for how long
  - Recidivism rates
  - Program performance
  - Operational costs
  - Other negative or positive impacts
Sources


