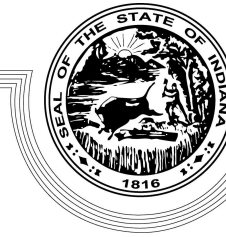


# Office of the Prosecuting Attorney

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Brand New Criminal Justice Statutes Take Effect July 1**

Starke County, March 30, 2021) – The vast majority of the bills signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb after the most recent legislative session officially become law on July 1, 2021. Many will directly impact criminal justice, the prosecutor's office, and our local community. Prosecutor Leslie A. Baker wanted to highlight some of these important measures before they go into effect.

Some of the highlights include:

HEA 1082- High Tech Crimes Unit: More and more evidence in criminal cases is virtual in nature. Cellphone data, computers, security cameras, technology plays a huge role in everyday life and in criminal investigations. But it takes a lot of time, knowledge and resources to be able to comb through digital evidence. HEA 1082 will help with that by providing funding for 10 high tech crime units in prosecutor offices across the state. By the end of 2021, the 10 selected counties will be announced. These units will not only service the host county but other counties in close proximity, ensuring that every prosecutor office has access to this technology that will help speed up the judicial process and result in better and quicker investigations.

SEA 167- Theft of Catalytic Converters: Seemingly every county in Indiana has seen this issue pop up more and more in recent years. Catalytic converters contain extremely valuable metals that are relatively simple to remove from the bottom of a car with the right knowledge and tools. Well organized rings can hit a parking lot and come away with several converters in one night. For the vehicle owners, the theft leaves the car inoperable and repairs can be extremely costly. In light of this, SEA 167 is a two-pronged approach, increasing the penalty for stealing a catalytic converter and also adding a penalty for purchasing stolen goods. This bill should hopefully discourage what has become an organized crime with thieves grabbing multiple converters and then selling them to metal dealers who usually are aware of what they are paying for.

SEA 187- Protecting Monuments, Memorials, and Statues: This bill creates some new laws and punishments regarding rioting, something that became a little more common in 2020. The punishment for rioting can now be enhanced to a Level 6 felony or Level 5 felony depending on if there is injury and property damage that exceeds a certain amount. The bill also mandates that Indiana State Police prioritize investigations regarding damage to monuments.

SEA 133- Sentencing: This act finally closes a loophole prosecutors have been pushing for awhile regarding drug dealers. The bill also mandates that sentences for Level 2 or 3 felony drug offenses can't be suspended by a judge if the offender has a prior, unrelated felony. This important legislation will ensure that drug dealers stay behind bars for an appropriate amount of time.

SEA 79- Protective Orders and Domestic Battery: Unfortunately, domestic violence cases are seen by our office far too often. SEA 79 was authored and signed as a way to increase penalties against offenders who commit domestic violence against someone that had a protective order against the offender. The new law also goes after repeat offenders, by increasing the penalty for domestic violence if the defendant has a previous conviction of battery or strangulation against that family member. Strangulation is becoming more and more prevalent in our charging data and is a dangerous precursor to more violent crimes. We are thankful lawmakers are taking it seriously and adding a stiffer penalty to those who commit it.

These are just a few of hundreds of new laws that will come into effect on July 1. Starke County residents are encouraged to visit <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2021/bills/> for a complete list.