

# Automakers urged to be transparent on tools to prevent thefts ahead of looming parliamentary deadline

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Dennis Wilson, whose theft prevention measures now include a bollard, wheel and steering wheel locks, and four Apple AirTags after his previous two cars were stolen, in Toronto on Feb. 20.

IAN WILLMS/THE NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Automakers have been told to detail what they are doing to address auto thefts to a parliamentary committee this week, a request that a group representing some of the biggest companies says is “potentially dangerous.”

A motion put forward by NDP MP Brian Masse that passed at the House of Commons industry and technology committee calls on automakers to share steps being taken to bolster security features. The motion requires manufacturers to submit responses to the committee by Wednesday.

Auto theft in Canada has increasingly garnered national attention, including from federal politicians. Experts say the issue is connected to organized crime and vehicles stolen in Canada are ending up in far-off places, including lots in Nigeria, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates. A summit was held earlier this month to discuss auto theft and the federal government recently announced it would spend an additional \$15-million for law-enforcement agencies working to combat the problem.

Mr. Masse's motion calls for companies to each produce a "comprehensive report on their strategies and initiatives taken to date and on further actions aimed at improving security features."

In an interview, Mr. Masse said there is responsibility for automakers to help address the issue, adding that perhaps a company can share a better approach that could be endorsed by the rest of the industry.

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"We've done it for bumpers and seatbelts, why can't we do it for this?" he said.

Brian Kingston, president and chief executive of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association, said the request from the industry committee is "misguided and potentially dangerous." Mr. Kingston's organization includes the membership of Ford, General Motors and Stellantis.

"Automakers keep vehicles secure by constantly updating the vehicle systems," he said, adding that this information is kept "extremely secret."

Mr. Kingston said to ask for specific details on anti-theft systems is "very concerning."

“The committee might as well ask automakers to hand over their blueprints to organized crime groups,” he said.

Automakers will respond to the committee but they will present information in a summary format that explains some of the measures that have been taken without getting into specific details, he said.

David Adams, president and CEO of Global Automakers of Canada, said what the industry committee is requesting is “fairly vague.” Mr. Adams’s organization is a national trade association that represents Canadian interests of 15 automakers.

He said the industry committee’s work will be a matter of public record and if the intention is to have companies go into great detail on security features, the result would be basically “handing the keys” to thieves.

In response to concerns, Mr. Masse said the committee does not want thieves to get a playbook to steal cars, but added that some transparency is required from automakers to help inform improvements on how to stop thefts.

All manufacturers are looking to protect their vehicles against theft and a number of members work with the Équité Association and law enforcement when vehicles are recovered after they have been stolen, Mr. Adams said.

Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne’s press secretary, Audrey Champoux, said in a statement the government welcomes work on this issue. She said an outcome of the recent summit in Ottawa was the need for auto companies to be more transparent with Canadians on their approach to safety measures and ensuring vehicles are guarded against theft.

The government understands auto manufacturers must maintain some confidentiality regarding research and development when it comes to specific security measures, she added, but added that Ottawa expects that they will share with the committee and Canadians some steps that have been taken.

Équité, a national organization that supports property and casualty insurers and works to combat insurance crime, says in Canada, a vehicle is now stolen every five

minutes and between 2021 and 2023, auto thefts increased sharply in Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada and in Western Canada.

Bryan Gast, vice-president of investigative services with the association, said auto theft is a complex problem and there is no “silver bullet” to solve it. He said all stakeholders have a role to play, including the manufacturers.

“If the vehicle is a lot harder to steal, that goes a long way in dropping our numbers,” he said.

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