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It's time for consequences for juvenile auto thieves

Statement from Alderman Mark A. Borkowski October 21, 2015

Milwaukee has seen an epidemic in 2015 of juveniles committing vehicle thefts, and then taking those vehicles for joyrides with sometimes fatal results.

The epidemic is out of control, and it needs to be stopped.

However, this cause would not be helped by a new bill, SB280/AB378, which is being introduced by state Sen. Jerry Petrowski and Rep. Rob Hutton. It would direct 17-year-olds accused of first-offense, non-violent crimes into juvenile court no matter what.

I believe their legislation is short-sighted and sends the wrong message. In fact, I believe a much harsher punishment is needed for juveniles 17 and under who are convicted of auto theft: automatic adult court.

Recently in Milwaukee, a 16-year-old girl driving a stolen vehicle ran a red light and crashed into two cars. The girl is expected to go before a judge soon for a plea hearing in adult court, where plea bargaining will surely take place.

Over the summer, a driver in a stolen van raced through a stop sign and killed a couple close to their South Side home. The summer and fall have been filled with news of juveniles stealing vehicles and joyriding—and in the worst cases, causing fatalities.

What's needed in these cases is an automatic transfer to adult court regardless of age, and for judges to start handing down severe punishments. This type of crime simply must stop.

If the reason given to keep kids out of adult court is that their brains are not “fully developed,” well, maybe offering severe ramifications for their actions will help some of them to “mentally mature.”

You can't have it both ways—actions have consequences, and ignorance is not an acceptable or justifiable excuse.