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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** AB 486                      **Hearing Date:** July 8, 2025  
**Author:** Lackey  
**Version:** June 18, 2025  
**Urgency:** No                                      **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** CA

**Subject:** *Crimes: burglary tools*

### HISTORY

**Source:** Author

**Prior Legislation:** SB 1554 (Dutton), Ch. 119, Stats. of 2008  
SB 2015 (Corbett), Ch. 339, Stats. of 2002

**Support:** California District Attorneys Association; California Police Chiefs Association;  
California State Sheriffs' Association; City of Los Alamitos; Los Angeles County  
Sheriff's Department

**Opposition:** ACLU California Action; Californians United for a Responsible Budget; Felony  
Murder Elimination Project; Initiate Justice; Initiate Justice Action

**Assembly Floor Vote:** 73 - 0

### PURPOSE

*The purpose of this bill is to make possession of a key programming device, key duplicating device, and signal extender with the intent to commit burglary a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in the county jail, a fine not to exceed \$1,000, or both.*

*Existing law* makes the possession of a picklock, crow, keybit, crowbar, screwdriver, vise grip pliers, water-pump pliers, slidehammer, slim jim, tension bar, lock pick gun, tubular lock pick, bump key, floor-safe door puller, master key, ceramic or porcelain spark plug chips or pieces, or other instrument or tool with the intent to break into any building, railroad car, vessel, or vehicle a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in county jail; a fine not to exceed \$1,000; or both. (Pen. Code, §§ 19 & 466.)

*Existing law* makes the possession of a key, tool, instrument, explosive, or device, or a drawing, print, or mold of a key, tool, instrument, explosive, or device designed to open, break into, tamper with, or damage a coin-operated machine with the intent to commit theft from such machine punishable by up to one year in county jail; by a fine of not more than \$1,000; or by both. (Pen. Code, § 466.3.)

*Existing law* provides that every person who, with the intent to use it in the commission of an unlawful act, possesses a motor vehicle master key, or a motor vehicle wheel lock master key is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in county jail; a fine not to exceed \$1,000; or both. (Pen. Code, §§ 19 & 466.5, subd. (a).)

*Existing law* provides that every person who, with the intent to use it in the commission of an unlawful act, possesses a motor vehicle key with knowledge that the key was made without the consent of either the registered or legal owner is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in county jail; a fine not to exceed \$1,000; or both. (Pen. Code, §§ 19 & 466.7.)

*Existing law* provides that every person who enters any house, room, apartment, tenement, shop, warehouse, store, mill, barn, stable, outhouse or other building, tent, vessel, floating home, railroad car, locked or sealed cargo container, whether or not mounted on a vehicle, trailer coach, any house car, inhabited camper, vehicle, when the doors are locked, aircraft, or mine or any underground portion thereof, with intent to commit theft or any felony is guilty of burglary. (Pen. Code, § 459.)

*Existing law* provides that burglary of an inhabited dwelling house is burglary of the first degree punishable by up to two, four, or six years in state prison, and all other burglaries are of the second degree punishable as an alternate misdemeanor by up to one year in the county jail/felony for 16 months, two years, or three years in the county jail. (Pen. Code, §§ 460 & 461.)

*This bill* expands the list of burglar tools to include key programming devices, key duplicating devices, and signal extenders.

*This bill* defines “key programming device” or “key duplicating device” as any device with the capability to access a vehicle’s onboard computer to allow additional keys to be made, delete keys, or remotely start the vehicle without the use of any key. A key duplicating device also includes any device with the ability to capture a key code or signal in order to remotely access a vehicle.

*This bill* defines “signal extender” as a key fob amplifier or other device that extends the signal range of a keyless entry car fob to send a coded signal to a receiver in a vehicle to lock, unlock, access a vehicle, start the engine, or interact with other remote commands associated to the vehicle’s onboard computer.

## COMMENTS

### 1. Need for This Bill

According to the author:

Criminals are using advanced key programming devices to steal vehicles in seconds - fueling crime and putting the public at risk. AB 486 updates California law to treat these devices as burglary tools when possessed without a lawful purpose, giving law enforcement a critical tool to combat rising auto theft. This bill updates our laws to keep pace with this evolving threat, and takes additional steps to keep Californians safe.

## 2. Key Cloner and Signal Amplification Car Thefts

Most newer cars are enabled with keyless or remote ignition. The fob has a signal that is transmitted to the vehicle computer system to allow the owner to start the car with the push of a button or enter without inserting a physical key. The owner can unlock or start their car by having their key fob near it.

According to Southern California police, “The added convenience of being able to start a vehicle without actually being in it is complicated by new advancements in technology being employed by thieves to steal newer cars, according to authorities. Thieves typically take advantage of keyless entry systems by using an aftermarket device – normally about the size of a cell phone or small tablet – to remotely scan for a key fob signal and quickly create a cloned key.” (<https://ktla.com/news/consumer-business/southern-california-police-warning-residents-of-increase-in-key-cloner-car-thefts/> [as of June 23, 2025].) According to the police, “Similar devices can plug in underneath a car’s dashboard and download the vehicle’s information, which can then be programmed into a blank key fob by thieves.” (*Ibid.*; see also <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/police-warn-residents-about-rise-in-key-cloner-car-thefts-in-san-fernando-valley/> [as of June 23, 2025] [police warning residents of a rise is “key cloner” car thefts in the San Fernando Valley, where thieves have been using electronic devices to replicate key fobs].)

Additionally, when the car is parked outside your home, someone can come with a relay device and waive it outside. If the fob is inside the home, they will be able to pick up the signal. The relay device is able to amplify the key fob distance even when it is a thousand feet away. A second device held close to the vehicle receives the signal from the fob and another person is able to unlock and take the vehicle. (<https://gpsleaders.com/signal-amplification-relays-to-steal-cars/> [as of June 23, 2025].)

This bill expands the list of burglar tools in current law to include key programming devices, key duplicating devices, and signal extenders.

## 3. Argument in Support

According to the California State Sheriffs’ Association:

Existing law makes the possession of specific instruments or tools with the intent to break into any building, railroad car, vessel, or vehicle a misdemeanor.

Unfortunately, current statutes are dated and do not contemplate modern cars with smart entry technologies, which are easy targets for hackers. As automobiles are becoming increasingly remote, thieves have created several techniques to hack the keyless entry system.

This legislative proposal recognizes the advancement of wireless technologies that have developed drastically over the last few decades, offering the public the convenience of using keyless go systems. AB 486 offers a necessary clarification in existing statute to safeguard properties and ensure criminals who take advantage of these useful tools and use them nefariously are held accountable.

#### 4. Argument in Opposition

According to Initiate Justice:

AB 486 adds to a problematic portion of the Penal Code. The bill adds to the Penal Code Section 466's list of "burglary tools" which can land someone a misdemeanor conviction for possessing the tool with criminal intent – a list that includes "screwdriver[s]". No law should criminalize possession based solely on what police or prosecutors believe is happening in the owner's mind. Moreover, no person should face criminal liability for their thoughts alone.

AB 486 is unnecessary to address the threat of carjacking. It is important to note that even if the entirety of PC 466 was removed, police would still have a tool to prevent carjackings. Namely, where an individual had criminal intent and made an act toward the commission of burglary or theft, they could be prosecuted for the crime of attempted burglary or attempted theft. Unlike PC 466, California's attempt laws provide prosecutors with a tool that doesn't rely solely on prosecutors' attempts to read a person's mind.

Expanding the PC 466 list will invite biased policing. Much like the rest of the PC 466 list, key programming devices, key duplicating devices, and signal extenders are often possessed by innocent actors, such as car mechanics and locksmiths. While PC 466's criminal intent standard might preclude some innocent actors from being convicted under AB 486, the intent standard does not prevent police from arresting and searching innocent actors. AB 486 invites police to harass car mechanics and locksmiths. Given general trends in policing, this would likely disproportionately affect people of color and less wealthy Californians.

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