



ZACH KLEIN
COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

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Contact: Pete Shipley, 614.965.0203
Email: pjshipley@columbus.gov

Columbus to File Lawsuit against Kia and Hyundai for Knowingly Selling Unsafe Vehicles Vulnerable to Theft

City Attorney Zach Klein says automakers willingly cut corners on safety features, leading to surge in thefts and millions of dollars in costs passed on to customers and the city itself

COLUMBUS, OH— Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein today announced his intent to file a lawsuit against automakers Kia and Hyundai for their failure to include industry standard anti-theft technology in vehicles that has led to soaring levels of theft in Columbus. The city has seen a more than 450 percent increase in the number of Kia and Hyundai thefts over the past year, an average of 17 thefts each day this year. Kia and Hyundai models account for nearly two-thirds of all vehicle theft attempts in Columbus so far this year.

For years, Kia and Hyundai manufactured vehicles without engine immobilizers or other alternative security features, such as reinforced steering columns and sensors designed to detect window glass breakage. Many of these features come standard on nearly every other consumer vehicle manufactured during the same timeframe.

“For years, Kia and Hyundai cut corners and sold vehicles they knew were so unsafe they could be stolen with ease by a teenager with access to simple tools and a TikTok account,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. **“Kia and Hyundai’s negligence in pursuit of corporate profit is unconscionable. It’s time we held these automakers accountable for cheating consumers and passing the buck and responsibility to clean up the mess they made onto the rest of us.”**

These deficiencies have been highlighted on social media platforms, where content creators describe how to steal a vehicle in a matter of minutes by anyone with a screwdriver and USB charger. The city alleges that the bulk of thefts are being perpetrated by juveniles, including a group known as the “Kia Boyz” who steal Kia and Hyundai vehicles, post their exploits to social media, and challenge others to do the same.

“In my 16 months as the Chief of Police, I have often asked what more can we do as an agency to save our children from themselves. We enforce the laws, are engaged with parents, collaborate with our judicial system, and are exploring programming in our schools,” said Columbus Chief of Police Elaine Bryant. **“And on this issue, we’ve asked Kia and Hyundai for their assistance. To date, we have received no meaningful cooperation. These automakers should be just as concerned as we**

are that their products are so easily accessible and are being used to commit felonious acts. As a result, our children are putting not only the community in harm's way, but themselves as well. We owe it to our children and our community to do all we can to prevent these often tragic events from occurring."

The City of Columbus contends that the rash of Kia and Hyundai thefts due to substandard security features in their vehicles have cost consumers, insurance companies, local governments and law enforcement millions of dollars over the past year alone. Further, the deficiencies in these vehicles have caused additional harms including a number of juveniles being seriously injured or killed during joyrides after easily stealing the vehicles with tools as simple as a screwdriver and USB cable.

Despite knowing of the security deficiencies of their vehicles, Kia and Hyundai have refused to recall or repair vehicles to better secure them from theft, instead largely ignoring calls for action and placing the burden to respond to the issue on consumers whose cars were stolen as well as local governments and law enforcement departments.

"The victims of these thefts aren't CEOs and executives, they're teachers and servers, retail workers and nurses—people whose lives have been upended and who've likely spent nights lying awake thinking about how they're going to afford to buy a new car while putting food on the table and making rent," added City Attorney Klein. **"These victims had their cars stolen through no fault of their own. They shouldn't have to bear the responsibility to make this right. The corporations who put profit above all else should be held accountable."**

Kia and Hyundai have intentionally and consciously manufactured, marketed, and sold vehicles that lacked sufficient, industry-standard security features, including engine immobilizers and certain other safety and anti-theft systems. The City has spent significant resources investigating and responding to these thefts, and the City's residents have to deal with the problems of juveniles and others illegally joy riding on Columbus streets and highways.

The City plans to ask the court to compel Kia and Hyundai to abate the public nuisance caused by their inaction that has led to the rise in thefts, and with it, the substantial cost incurred by the city as it continues to respond to the automakers' negligence.

Additionally, the City also plans to seek injunctive relief to prohibit the further sale of unsafe vehicles and require Kia and Hyundai to recall, repair or replace the unsafe vehicles currently on the road, as well as damages in excess of \$25,000, punitive damages, legal expenses, and pre- and post-judgment interest in the case.

"Kia and Hyundai marketed and sold cars they knew were unsafe and now refuse to take any responsibility as others have to bear the consequences of their decisions. That's not right," said Columbus Solicitor General Rich Coglianese. **"This is a mess these automakers made, and the City of Columbus will use every tool we have to hold them accountable for their inaction."**

City Attorney Klein said he intends to file the lawsuit on behalf of the City of Columbus in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas in the coming weeks, but first needs City Council to approve a contract to hire special counsel for the City in the case, Allen, Stovall, Neuman and Ashton LLP. That motion will come before Council at its Nov. 7 meeting.

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