

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 171

(Senator Waldstreicher)

Judicial Proceedings

Mail Theft

This bill establishes a new offense that establishes graduated penalties for violations of the general theft statute (under § 7-104 of the Criminal Law Article) involving the theft of “mail” (mail theft) based on the number of items of mail stolen. The bill also establishes prohibitions involving the use or possession of an “arrow key.” A sentence for a conviction for mail theft or an arrow key offense under the bill may be separate from and consecutive to or concurrent with a sentence for any other crime based on the acts establishing the violation. The District Court has concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts for felony mail theft and arrow key violations. Finally, the bill repeals the existing offense of taking and breaking open a letter. Instead, the bill prohibits a person from knowingly and intentionally opening “mail” addressed to another without the permission of the other or the other’s representative. Violators are guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for up to one month and/or a \$1,000 maximum fine.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect State finances or operations.

Local Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect local finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Definitions

“Arrow key” means a key designed exclusively for allowing an employee of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) or a common carrier or delivery service to access a mailbox or other depository for storing mail.

“Mail” means an item that has been or is intended to be delivered by USPS or a common carrier or delivery service to a person whose address appears on the item. Mail includes an addressed letter, a postal card, or a package.

Exhibit 1 lists the penalties for a violation of § 7-104 of the Criminal Law Article (general theft) involving mail based on the number of items of mail stolen, mail theft involving an arrow key, and possession of an arrow key with the intent to use it to commit mail theft or allow it to be used to commit mail theft.

Exhibit 1 **Penalties for Mail Theft and Arrow Key Offenses under the Bill**

<u>Offense</u>	<u>Penalties</u>
Theft of at least 1 but less than 16 items of mail	Misdemeanor – imprisonment for up to 6 months and/or a maximum fine of \$1,000
Theft of 16 or more items of mail	Felony – imprisonment for up to two years and/or a maximum fine of \$2,000
Theft of at least 1 item of mail using an arrow key	Felony – imprisonment for up to five years and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000
Possession of an arrow key with the intent to use or allow the use of the arrow key to commit mail theft	Felony – imprisonment for up to three years and/or a maximum fine of \$3,000

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Current Law:

Opening a Letter without Permission – Repealed and Replaced Under the Bill

A person is prohibited from taking and breaking open a letter that is not addressed to them without permission from the person to whom the letter is addressed or the personal representative of the addressee's estate. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to imprisonment for six days and a fine of \$15.

General Theft Statute – § 7-104 of the Criminal Law Article

Under the general theft statute, a person may not, under specified circumstances, (1) willfully or knowingly obtain or exert unauthorized control over property; (2) obtain control over property by willfully or knowingly using deception; (3) possess stolen property knowing that it has been stolen or believing that it probably has been stolen; (4) obtain control over property knowing that the property was lost, mislaid, or delivered under a mistake as to the identity of the recipient or nature or amount of the property; or (5) obtain the services of another that are available only by compensation by deception or with knowledge that the services are provided without the provider's consent. A violator is required to restore the owner's property or pay the owner the value of the property or services and is subject to the penalties in **Exhibit 2**.

Postal Service-related Theft under Federal Law

It is a federal crime to steal or receive stolen mail, as specified under 18 USC § 1708. On conviction, a violator is subject to imprisonment for up to five years and/or a \$250,000 maximum fine.

It is also a federal crime to steal any property used by USPS, as specified under 18 USC § 1707. On conviction, a violator is subject to (1) if the value of the stolen property does not exceed \$1,000, imprisonment for up to one year and/or a maximum fine of \$100,000 or (2) if the value of stolen property is more than \$1,000, imprisonment for up to three years and/or a maximum fine of \$250,000.

State Fiscal Effect: The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) advises that the bill increases the workload in existing cases and may result in new cases. OPD estimates the increase is equivalent to one additional attorney statewide. The Department of Legislative Services advises that the bill is not anticipated to result in additional cases or clients for OPD sufficient to require additional personnel. Moreover, while the bill *may* result in an increased level of effort in certain cases where a more stringent penalty may apply under the bill, the magnitude of any such increase is expected to be minimal. Thus, the effect on OPD caseloads is likely absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Exhibit 2
Penalties for General Theft

<u>Value of Property and/or Services</u>	<u>Maximum Penalty</u>
Less than \$100*	Misdemeanor – 90 days imprisonment and/or \$500 fine
At least \$100 but less than \$1,500*	Misdemeanor – 6 months imprisonment and/or \$500 fine (first conviction) or 1 year imprisonment and/or \$500 fine (second or subsequent conviction)
Less than \$1,500 (four or more prior theft convictions)**	Misdemeanor – 5 years imprisonment and/or \$5,000 fine
At least \$1,500 but less than \$25,000	Felony – 5 years imprisonment and/or \$10,000 fine
At least \$25,000 but less than \$100,000	Felony – 10 years imprisonment and/or \$15,000 fine
\$100,000 or more	Felony – 20 years imprisonment and/or \$25,000 fine

* Subject to two-year statute of limitations.

** Subject to specified notice requirements.

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Additional Comments: According to the Judiciary, there were 21 violations (charges) and 1 guilty disposition for violations of opening a letter without permission under § 3-905 of the Criminal Law Article in the District Court during fiscal 2024. There were 16 violations and 1 guilty disposition for this offense in the District Court during fiscal 2025. Data for general theft violations does not distinguish if violations involved the theft of mail or packages.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 410 and HB 805 of 2025 and SB 373 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: HB 159 (Delegate Solomon) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Maryland State's Attorneys' Association; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 21, 2026
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Analysis by: Donavan A. Ham

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510