



# JPA

Juvenile Protective Association



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***“They don’t set out to be criminals. They’re just desperate people.”***

My car was stolen last weekend. The last time I saw it was Friday night after work as I pulled into a secured parking garage under my condo building. It’s a strange sensation walking to the slot where your vehicle is supposed to be and see empty space. Is it possible, I wondered, that I was so tired I parked in someone else’s’ spot? Had I parked my car outside? No, it was gone. Stolen, as it turns out.

At 2:30 am Monday, I received a call from a detective in Dubuque, Iowa. My car had been recovered. Apparently, it had been taken by a local Chicago resident well known to the police. This individual has a history of car theft – and of mental illness. When she ran out of gas in Dubuque, she called the police for help. According to the detective, she took the car to escape from a stranger who wanted to murder her. I can only imagine her terror.

While it appears she threw everything in my car out the window, it also appears she didn’t personally keep the gifts in the trunk or my makeup or my gym bag with an unworn pair of recently purchased sneakers. She tossed it all. And she seems to have been a careful driver. My car was returned without a scratch on it.

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Once the car was recovered, I worked with a local detective who told me 50% to 60% of the people he arrests exhibit an addiction and/or mental health issue. He said, expressing his personal view, “They don’t set out to be criminals. They’re just desperate people.”

While I was waiting for my car, I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation totaling the costs of having two police departments investigate this theft, the insurance costs (from the claims department to the monetary reimbursement), the towing company expense, the costs of jail lodging, court costs, etc. The amount would easily have covered almost a year of mental health services. I requested that the detective ask the judge to recommend mental health services, not strict jail time for the woman.

At a time when millions of people are at risk of being thrown off insurance, when we’re fighting for mental health parity, and when we’re trying to balance the national budget, you have to ask yourself, does it make sense to criminalize mental illness? I don’t think so. Fortunately, I’m not alone. I encourage you to check out an [effective model developed by Miami-Dade County Judge Steve Leifman](#). Because if you think the issue of mental health will never touch you, I hope you’ll think again. It might be your car next time.



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