

NEWS RELEASE

Luther Strange

Alabama Attorney General



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For More Information, contact:

Joy Patterson (334) 242-7491

Suzanne Webb (334) 242-7351

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AG STRANGE, SEN. ALLEN, REP. MERRILL, ANNOUNCE INTRODUCTION OF BILL WITH TOUGH LOOTING PENALTIES

(MONTGOMERY) – In the wake of the tragic tornadoes that have recently devastated Alabama, Attorney General Strange advocated a tough law that specifically criminalizes looting and provides strong penalties. Today he delivered on that, with a bill that has been introduced in the Alabama Legislature and is being sponsored by Sen. Gerald Allen and Rep. John Merrill. Attorney General Strange, Sen. Allen and Rep. Merrill stood together with many of their fellow legislators at a news conference today to push for passage of this important bill.

“In times of disaster when people are experiencing destruction of property, serious injuries and perhaps even the loss of loved ones, it is appalling to see criminal activity that takes advantage of a tragedy by looting what may be left of a business’s inventory or the belongings from someone’s home,” said Attorney General Strange. “Sadly, it has become all too evident that Alabama needs a stronger law to protect our citizens at just such times when they are suffering and vulnerable. The law we propose would apply in other times of emergency such as the hurricanes that frequently strike our Gulf Coast. Senator Ben Brooks of Mobile and also a co-sponsor has been a strong advocate of criminal penalties for looting in the wake of recent devastating hurricanes. Today we send a strong and clear message to those who would prey on our people at such times that this will not be tolerated in Alabama.”

Sen. Allen said, “First, I want to thank the Attorney General for bringing this piece of legislation forward and I’m honored to sponsor such a critical measure to crack down on those who commit the heartless act of looting after a disaster strikes our state. This bill will ensure that those who prey upon the victims of tragedy will not simply receive a slap on the wrist, and once this law is enacted, those who do will not simply be criminals - they’ll be felons. I encourage my colleagues in the Senate, as well as members of the House of Representatives, to join me in ushering this bill through the legislature to send a message to those who commit these unconscionable acts - exploiting victims will not be tolerated in Alabama.”

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501 Washington Avenue • Montgomery, AL 36104 • (334) 242-7300

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Rep. Merrill stated, "Whenever communities and families experience tragedies as so many Alabamians have through tornadoes and hurricanes, there is loss of life, loss of property and loss of spirit. Unfortunately, there are those among us who choose not to support these families and individuals who are suffering, but they choose to take from those who are suffering while they are at their most vulnerable. With the introduction of this bill, we intend to make these vultures pay for their crimes by punishing them to the fullest extent of the law!"

Attorney General Strange developed this legislation based on discussions within the Attorney General's Law Enforcement Advisory Committee and the law officers' recommendations for better tools to combat looting. Under current law, Alabama does not have a crime specific to looting, and existing laws against burglary, theft and trespassing have not been adequate to fight the looting that becomes epidemic during times of disaster.

Senate bill 302 and House bill 340 specifically criminalize looting and make it a class C felony, which is punishable by one to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$15,000. "A person commits the crime of looting if the person intentionally injures without authorization any building or real property during a state of emergency and obtains, exerts control over, damages, or removes the property of another person without lawful authority." It also is specified that a person subject to prosecution for looting still may be prosecuted for other applicable offenses. This law would apply when the Governor has proclaimed an official state of emergency.

In addition to Sen. Allen, there are 10 co-sponsors to the Senate bill, and in addition to Rep. Merrill, there are 53 co-sponsors to the House bill.