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NEWS RELEASE



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Stronger Penalties Now in Place for Disaster Looting & Emergency Impersonation

VENTURA, Calif. – A new set of public safety laws strongly supported by Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko have taken effect in 2026, strengthening penalties for looting and the impersonation of emergency personnel during declared emergencies.

“Ventura County is no stranger to disaster, and our residents know firsthand how devastating these events can be,” said District Attorney Nasarenko. “When families are evacuating from a dangerous fire and first responders are risking their lives, we can’t have criminals exploiting the chaos and devastation. These new laws will allow us to crack down on looters and criminal impersonators.”

Governor Gavin Newsom signed companion legislation in Assembly Bill 468 and Senate Bill 571 into law in October. AB 468, authored by Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, strengthens penalties for looting during declared emergencies and extends protections into the recovery and rebuilding phase following disasters. SB 571 reinforces penalties for individuals who impersonate firefighters, law enforcement officers, or other officials during emergencies.

“Individuals who put our firefighters at risk and prey on communities when they are at their most vulnerable must be held accountable. Looters – particularly those who impersonate emergency personnel – create chaos and confusion, endanger residents and first responders, and victimize communities that already have suffered unimaginable harm,” said Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel. “I am proud this year to have joined efforts with firefighters, police, and first responders across California who bravely risk their lives to protect our communities, to craft better tools to crack down on looting and impersonation.”

These measures were introduced in response to widespread looting and impersonation crimes following the deadly wildfires in Los Angeles County, where impacted communities were victimized at a time of extreme vulnerability.