INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES

FIGHTING ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME

ISSUE BRIEF

IDA POSITION

Congress can make our communities safer while lowering costs for consumers by enacting the Combatting Organized Retail Crime Act.

BACKGROUND

The emergence of organized retail crime has led to a vicious cycle in downtowns: retail theft has caused some retailers to close their doors. The loss of activity, coupled with fear about crime, dissuades workers, shoppers and visitors from coming downtown, which further threatens the viability of all retail businesses in urban centers. Addressing the root causes of organized retail crime is critical to restoring vitality to downtowns.

According to a 2024 report from the National Retail Federation and the Loss Prevention Research Council, retailers experienced a 93 percent increase in the average number of shoplifting incidents per year in 2023 over 2019, and a 90 percent increase in dollar loss due to shoplifting. While shoplifting has long been an issue for retailers, recent years have seen a marked rise in organized retail crime. Criminal enterprises hire individuals to steal large quantities of merchandise from multiple stores, and then sell it for cash in online auctions, flea markets and elsewhere.

The emergence of organized retail crime has been marked by the rise in the number of frequent and repeat offenders, a higher frequency of thefts and the amount and value of merchandise stolen per theft. Most troublingly, organized retail crime has led to an increase in violence, the threat of violence and use of weapons by shoplifters. In the 2024 report, 73 percent of retailers reported that shoplifters are more aggressive and violent than in the past, with 84 percent expressing heightened concern about the violence occurring during theft incidents.

Organized retail theft has profound implications on both consumers and the neighborhoods that rely on retail. It has forced stores to increase security measures and pay higher insurance premiums, which ultimately lead to higher prices. Increased theft and violence make it harder for retail stores to attract and retain employees. Increased security in retail stores creates a less welcoming environment for customers. And it prompts stores to close altogether, leaving fewer amenities and economic activity in America's downtowns and main streets.

FEDERAL POLICY

As organized retail crime has increased, the business sector and state and local law enforcement have stepped up efforts to fight it. But because criminal enterprises often operate across state lines, and in some cases, internationally, a strong federal response is necessary.

The bipartisan Combatting Organized Retail Crime Act (S.1401/H.R. 2853) would make a significant contribution to the fight against organized retail crime. The bill would establish an Organized Retail Crime Coordination Center in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to align activities nationally and internationally by developing national-level organized retail crime intelligence, facilitating information sharing and cross-agency investigations and serving as a center of expertise for training and technical assistance.

When coupled with state and local programs, as well as with federal assistance like the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program, this legislation will give retailers, local law enforcement and municipal governments more tools and expertise to fight this growing challenge.

ABOUT IDA

IDA is the premier organization for urban place professionals who are shaping and activating dynamic city center districts. Our members are city builders and downtown champions who bring urban centers to life, bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. We represent an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations, employing 100,000 people throughout North America and growing rapidly around the world. Founded in 1954, IDA is a resource center for ideas and innovative best practices in urban place management. For more information, visit downtown.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Andrew Goldberg, Principal, Agora at andrew@agoragov.com or 202.321.1877

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