



February 15, 2024

**RE: HB 948 – Organized Retail Theft – Venue for Prosecution, Warrantless Arrest Authority, and Court Finding**

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

My name is Julian (Blackie) Wills and I am the President and CEO for Dash In Convenience Stores, a Maryland-based company with 40 outlets in the state employing about 800 between these outlets. We are owned by The Wills Group, Inc., a Maryland-based company founded over 98 years ago and I am part of the fourth generation of family leadership for the organization. We have community-based values and donate over \$1 million annually to our charitable partners including various food banks.

I am writing in support of House Bill 948 for the following reasons:

- Retail theft has been on a rapid ascent in the last two years. We previously would see about one major incident per month across our network, but it now seems there is at least one major theft every week.
- The value of the goods in our stores is low but the thieves have focused their attention on tobacco products, namely cartons of cigarettes. We often experience robberies of cigarette cartons. (Previously, we experienced robberies of cash, but our cash management procedures have reduced the amount of cash available to a minimal amount, thus shifting the focus to our products.)
- It is typically the same suspects who are hitting multiple stores. They know that the value of the theft results in a misdemeanor charge so they hit multiple outlets at a time.
- The proposed legislation should force these criminals to think twice about continuing with these thefts. And it will give law enforcement and the judicial system the required teeth to prosecute these criminals.

Thank you for your time and please advise of any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julian Wills III".

Julian (Blackie) Wills III  
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