



**HB179/SB11 Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**  
**January 21, 2025**

**Background:** The following letter was circulated to County government representatives in all 24 of Maryland’s local jurisdictions. The signatories below agreed to sign in an expression of support of HB179 and SB11 on behalf of their districts, as elected.

Chairs Smith and Clippinger,

We, the undersigned County and City officials, write to draw your attention to and express support for legislation to address organized retail theft in Maryland.

Retailers across Maryland continue to be plagued by high theft rates, impacting local economic health, store stability, and customer experiences. The issue of retail theft has grown drastically beyond simple petty shoplifting and is underrepresented in crime statistics due to low reporting. Organized retail theft is a money-making scheme often used to raise funds to support the drug trade, gang activity, and even international crime rings. Organized criminals benefit not only from Maryland’s high felony theft threshold of \$1,500, but also from a loophole in State law which allows thieves to steal thousands of dollars’ worth of goods in sprees across county lines without having to face felony theft charges. Currently, related thefts committed within one jurisdiction can be joined and prosecuted as a felony; unfortunately, the law stops at the county line and does not allow for similar aggregation to occur between multiple jurisdictions.

Increased violence against store employees and even other customers has led many large retailers to develop no-interference policies, allowing thieves to leave with stolen goods in order to protect other retail patrons. Efforts to reduce and disincentivize theft include products being locked away from customer access, fewer products on shelves, heightened security presence in stores, and increased technology to analyze customers’ every move and stop unscanned goods from leaving stores. These tactics often have a negative impact on all customers’ experiences, but retailers have few other choices when State policies and law enforcement response do little to address the problem.

Maryland’s Office of the Attorney General has turned its attention to organized retail crime under the current administration, and prosecutors in the Organized Crime Unit do have the ability to join charges across jurisdictional lines; however, that Unit does not have the capacity to pursue every possible instance of organized theft occurring in Maryland, and the lower courts do not have the ability to similarly join and prosecute across jurisdictional lines for these schemes and continuing courses of conduct. Thus, criminals continue to take advantage of the felony theft “loophole” by carefully planning sprees across the state that remain at the misdemeanor level in multiple counties.

Legislation pursued by the Maryland Retailers Alliance would close the aggregation loophole with three simple goals:

1. Define “organized retail theft” in Maryland law.
2. Allow thefts committed by the same person in multiple counties under one scheme or continuing course of conduct to be joined and prosecuted in any county in which the thefts occurred.
3. Require data collection on the rates of organized retail theft convictions in Maryland after the bill’s passage.

It is our belief that this legislation would reduce theft rates in Maryland by allowing law enforcement and prosecution teams to better target career criminals and organized theft rings and prosecute felony charges. The bill has continuously received bipartisan support in both the Senate and House of Delegates, and questions regarding joinder and constitutionality have been addressed by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General, which expressed in writing that constitutionality concerns were not found in legislative review.

We respectfully request that you support the legislative solutions brought forward by the Maryland Retailers Alliance and allow appropriate felony charges to be brought against organized criminals in Maryland.

Sincerely,

David J. Caporale  
*President, Board of County Commissioners*  
Allegany County

Steuart L. Pittman, Jr.  
*County Executive*  
Anne Arundel County

Earl F. “Buddy” Hance  
*President, Board of County Commissioners*  
Calvert County

J. Travis Breeding  
*President, County Commissioners*  
Caroline County

Adam M. Streight  
*County Executive*  
Cecil County

Reuben B. Collins II  
*President, County Commissioners*  
Charles County

George L. “Lenny” Pfeffer, Jr.  
*President, County Council*  
Dorchester County

Paul C. Edwards  
*Chair, Board of County Commissioners*  
Garrett County

Robert G. Cassilly  
*County Executive*  
Harford County

Calvin V. Ball III  
*County Executive*  
Howard County

Marc B. Elrich  
*County Executive*  
Montgomery County

Tara H. Jackson  
*Acting County Executive*  
Prince George’s County

James J. Moran  
*President, Board of County Commissioners*  
Queen Anne’s County

John F. Barr  
*President, Board of County Commissioners*  
Washington County

Julie M. Giordano  
*County Executive*  
Wicomico County

Anthony W. “Chip” Bertino, Jr.  
*President, Board of County Commissioners*  
Worcester County