

January 21, 2025

Senator Ron Watson's Testimony on SB 11, Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025

Good Afternoon, Chair Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the committee. Senator Ron Watson here from the 23rd Legislative District and I am here to ask for your support for Senate Bill 11, "The Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025". The hearing on this bill should be quick and easy given that this committee along with the entire Senate that voted favorably to pass this bill during our last session in 2024.

This is a very simple bill aimed at stopping a very real issue that is occurring each and every day in our communities. This bill addresses the problem of organized retail theft.

As you may recall, Organized Retail Theft is a commission either alone or in concert with one or more persons of a series of thefts of retail merchandise from one or more retail merchants over a 90-day period with the intent to:

- 1) permanently deprive merchants of merchandise;
- 2) return the merchandise to the merchant for monetary gain, resell, trade, barter, or in any other way to seek gain from the stolen items.

And the aggregate value must exceed at least \$1,500.00.

Examples: Three suspects were caught 18, 19, and 26-year-olds with over 10,000 worth of stolen merchandise. They were connected to 10 separate thefts that occurred during a two-month period.

Two shoplifters caught in Leesburg, Virginia were involved in a theft of merchandise valued at over \$158,000. The reason why am I talking about Leesburg is because the 29-year-old female and 30-year-old male were both from Laurel, Maryland and Washington DC, and are said to account for 68% more retail crime than you would expect based on a national average and that has trickled into the state of Maryland.

Currently, there is a loophole in the law that does not allow these thefts to be joined across jurisdictions. This bill would fix it.

Organized crime rings strategically travel across county lines when committing multiple thefts to avoid coupling the amount and facing felony theft charges.

This organized retail theft is a very serious problem that has ballooned to over a \$100 billion criminal industry in the United States alone and the impacts are felt in communities in many ways: from higher prices, store closures, lost sales tax and revenue for the State and localities, and increased crimes that are funded by retail theft.

We have all seen the television with the smash and grab and the tactics that are currently being used when young folks with hoodies break into retail stores and take as much as they want. We're not talking about infant diapers and baby formula. We're talking about high-end luxury bags, cologne, perfume, and anything that can be resold, and where are they reselling it? It's being sold

on eBay, Facebook & other online platforms. It's also being sold from the back of the barber shops, beauty shops and just by Word of Mouth. Do you need a TV? I'll tell you where to go get it.

I have several people here to speak on the benefits of having this bill, why it is important and why it makes sense but as I said to you before crime always takes the path of least resistance and throughout our region each jurisdiction is looking at ways to address organized retail theft and we can not take action and make it easier for the criminals to come to Maryland to do what they do.

Let me just say in the fight against organized retail theft, it is essential to recognize that this is not a victimless crime. Every stolen item represents more than just a loss for a business, it impacts the livelihoods of hardworking individuals and jeopardizes the economic health of our communities.

This is how you create a food desert if you let this continue. You want more crime in the neighborhoods, let this continue. This has to stop and members of this committee know about the Broken Window Theory, if we do not act on this it'll just get worse and worse and then we will wonder what happened because we didn't take this opportunity to take action at this time. Mr. Chair, I ask this committee to once again give a favorable vote on Senate Bill 11.