



**CALVERT COUNTY  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

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*Board of Commissioners*  
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January 14, 2025

The Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair  
Judiciary Committee  
100 Taylor House Office Building  
101 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB11/HB179 – Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025

Chair Smith, Chair Clippinger and Committee Members:

The Board of County Commissioners for Calvert County writes in **SUPPORT** of **SB11** and **HB179** and requests a **FAVORABLE** Committee report. 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 previously 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 prior legislative review.

Your thoughtful consideration of this request is sincerely appreciated. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact County Administrator Julian M. Willis at 410-535-1600, ext. 2202 or County Attorney John Norris at 410-535-1600, ext. 2566. Thank you for your kind consideration of our position regarding this important local Bill.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND



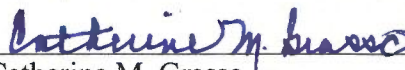
Earl F. Hance, President



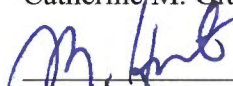
Todd Ireland, Vice President



Mark C. Cox Sr.



Catherine M. Grasso



Mike Hart

cc: Calvert County Senators and Delegation