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The Maryland House of Delegates

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 446 – Organized Retail Theft

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of **House Bill 446 – Organized Retail Theft**.

Organized retail crime in Maryland has increased in recent years. The crime rings often operate in several counties, and the fact that more than one jurisdiction is involved can complicate bringing perpetrators to justice. House Bill 446 seeks to make it easier to prosecute crime rings that target widespread victims and establishments.

First, House Bill 446 defines organized retail theft as the commission, either alone or with one or more other persons, of a series of thefts of retail merchandise from one or more retail merchants with the intent to return the merchandise to the merchant for value or resell, trade, or barter the merchandise for value.

Second, the legislation stipulates that multiple thefts committed by the same person in multiple counties under one scheme or continuing course of conduct may be aggregated and prosecuted in any county in which any one of the thefts occurred.

Finally, House Bill 446 requires that if a court finds that an individual committed organized retail theft, the finding becomes a part of the court record for the purposes of reporting to the Criminal Justice Information System Central Repository.

In last year's session, this measure unanimously passed Judicial Proceedings. Due to the pandemic-abbreviated session, time ran out to move this forward on the House side. This year's version clarifies the aggregating of theft across jurisdictions and provides a definition so that we can track organized retail theft separately from other types of theft. Please note that the definition portion was negotiated as part of raising the felony theft threshold when the Justice Reinvestment Act was passed. The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention was to begin tracking organized retail crime, but no definition existed for them to do so.

In sum, this legislation aims to provide our justice system with the ability to allow multiple thefts committed by the same person in multiple counties under one criminal scheme or

continuing course of conduct to be combined and prosecuted as part of an overall scheme in any county in which any one of the thefts occurred.

I respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 446.