



RE: HB 179 – Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025 (HB 179 / SB 11)

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 99 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 179 (SB 11) for the following reasons:

- The convenience store industry continues to grow in hard-to-reach communities for traditional grocery stores and it faces the same issues with increased crimes in our stores.
- Retail theft has been on a rapid ascent in the last three 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. We catalogue these events and we saw almost **51 separate incidents in 2024 alone, resulting in over \$43,000 in total cash and property losses.**
- But we are facing increased crime by people who are acting in a coordinated fashion. These are not "one-offs." These criminals are not only stealing large amounts of product, but they are attempting to steal ATM machines, cash drawers, and even car wash payment terminals. **We have incurred property damages well above \$25,000 in the past year due to retail theft rings.**
- 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.)
- 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,

Julian (Blackie) Wills III
CEO & President
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