



CALIFORNIANS AGAINST RETAIL & RESIDENTIAL THEFT

Retail Theft Impacts Customers, Workers and Our Communities

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Retail theft is a growing problem throughout California. Local news broadcasts and newspapers highlight the problem. Even social media has viral videos of retail theft. Whether it is called smash and grabs, organized retail theft, or simply shoplifting, it has a tremendous impact on small businesses and large retailers.

The National Retailers Federation survey found inventory shrinkage, loss due to theft and fraud, is at a five-year high. The report further found a nearly 60% increase in losses over the past five years.

This increase is causing stores to adjust their policies. As President of Superior Grocers, an independently-owned chain of 48 grocery stores, I oversaw the implementation of additional security measures. The company spent millions of dollars adding new security cameras. Our stores now have wheel-locking shopping carts for those who try to abscond without paying. We also hired additional security personnel at some locations.

Despite these efforts, I receive more than 200 theft notifications daily. These reports range from one item being taken to thousands of dollars' worth of items.

While some may perceive retail theft as a victimless crime, it leads to two big problems. The first and most important is the safety of our staff and customers. If a team member or a good Samaritan confronts a thief, the chances of a physical confrontation and injury rise dramatically.

Unfortunately, thieves are becoming more brazen. Last month, a store clerk in San Jose confronted a thief in the liquor aisle. Rather than running, the thief pulled out a gun and killed the clerk. A life was taken. Family and friends mourn as someone loses his life over a liquor bottle. We cannot allow this to happen to our employees and our customers.

The second is the losses businesses face from theft and how to recoup those costs. For Superior Grocers, with more than 70,000 theft incidences annually, equating to more than \$1 million in losses. To make up for those losses, businesses must increase prices on items to make up for the losses, passing the costs onto the consumers. The other option is to reduce costs. To decrease costs requires letting

some employees go, reducing hours of operation, or shutting down a store altogether.

California businesses are experiencing more shoplifting cases. While law enforcement agencies do not keep statistics specifically on shoplifting, retail thefts are reported as property crimes. According to the San Francisco Police Department, property crimes are up nearly 8% for the first six months of this year. Los Angeles Police Department reported property crimes increased by an astonishing 14% for the first half of this year.

With property crimes rising and criminals becoming more brazen, you would think that the Legislature would provide more tools to law enforcement to address the problem. However, the Legislature is doing very little. Either legislators do not understand retail crime's actual ramifications or are indifferent to the problem.

That is why I, along with other business owners around the state, are contacting our elected officials and raising awareness about the problems associated with retail theft. Once our elected officials truly understand that retail theft increases prices, impacts workers, and hurts our communities, then and only then can California reform policies to address property crimes.

In the meantime, if you witness a crime, please report it to law enforcement. Police will reallocate resources to address crime spikes. More importantly, do not engage the criminal. Your life is more important than a case of beer or a pair of shoes.

As crime continues to rise, our communities are negatively impacted. It is time for our elected officials to take action.

Richard Wardwell is President/COO of Superior Grocers, a Southern California independently owned chain of grocery stores.

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