

# Widespread Shoplifting in America



By: Amil Imani

December 3, 2023

I urge the Governor of New York, Kathy Hochul, to take action to address this issue of rampant shoplifting and organized theft. I have heard the governor vetoed a proposed bill to establish a task force to combat organized theft. This decision has left the Retail Council of New York State, which represents retailers in the state, thoroughly disappointed.

The New York Police Department reported that 327 individuals were responsible for over a third of the retail thefts in 2022. These individuals were arrested a total of 6,000 times! What does this mean? They are arrested after the crime and then let off so they can return to their merry ways again! Isn't it pedestrian common sense to ensure that repeat criminals are held accountable?

The National Retail Federation also reported national shrinkage losses of \$112 billion in 2022, indicating a widespread problem across the retail industry.

Retailers are now taking preventative measures to combat this issue. For example, Dollar Tree has said it plans to remove goods from its stores like men's underwear, an item most prone to retail theft. Retailers are also ramping up prevention methods, with 34% of respondents increasing internal payroll to support risks related to retail crime and 46% increasing the use of third-party security personnel, among other

methods.

Since there is no other go, I suggest that they also take these measures to prevent shoplifting and organized theft:

**Surveillance and Security Measures:** Increase their surveillance capabilities to monitor their stores and deter shoplifters. This includes installing security cameras throughout the store and parking lot to detect and prevent criminal activity. They should also consider using electronic locks and other technologies to secure their stores.

**Inventory Management:** Retailers need to optimize their inventory management to identify discrepancies that may indicate high-theft items. This involves completing frequent physical counts to verify the information.

**Policy Collaboration:** Retailers also need to extensively collaborate with policing and government bodies to tackle the rise in shoplifting. This should include sharing intelligence with policing, understanding the tactics used by organized retail crime gangs, and identifying more offenders.

**Customer Engagement:** This is a must. Increase the visibility of high-theft items and acknowledge all customers to deter potential theft. It is better to create a single entry point and exit for the self-check area and staff it with a customer service monitor to enhance transaction monitoring.

**Technological Solutions:** The cost will be ultimately justified, so the retailers need to start using digital signage to display real-time video of customers as they shop, acting as a deterrent. They should also consider using cloud-based digital signage to mount small profile Smart TV screens adjacent to high ticket items and electronics.

**Staffing and Training:** This is the core of all preventive measures. Staff self-checkout areas with customer service monitors to indicate to potential thieves that they are being

watched. Train your employees to handle self-checkout areas and monitor transactions.

One might also consider using low-tech measures, such as public-facing video monitors, giving front-end staff walkie-talkies, and installing a mirror on the kiosk to curb shoplifting at self-checkout lanes. Rather than stand-alone, this would help to complement more expensive high-tech ones to reduce inventory losses. Resource-rich companies like Walmart already use AI-powered cameras to recognize items and human behavior. The system alerts nearby employees of accidentally missed or intentionally skipped merchandise scans.

Given the apathy of our lawmakers, retailers should go for a multi-faceted approach to tackle the rise in shoplifting and organized theft. No single measure can eliminate theft; only a combination of strategies can effectively deter potential thieves.

The overall results might be somewhat mixed, but taking measures to safeguard your business is better than doing nothing and letting your stores get looted in broad daylight.

However, I understand that the effectiveness of these measures can vary depending on the specific context and implementation. Therefore, it should be the number one priority for the voters to urge the governor to take immediate action!

© 2023 Amil Imani – All Rights Reserved