

# **Attorney General Raoul Announces Public-Private Partnership Aimed At Disrupting Organized Retail Crimes**

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CHICAGO – Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced a partnership between public and private entities designed to combat the increase in organized retail crime.

The Attorney General's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is the first large-scale, public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois and is designed to foster cooperation among retailers, online marketplaces, law enforcement agencies, and state's attorneys dedicated to targeting organized retail crime enterprises.

Attorney General Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is comprised of career investigators and attorneys from the Attorney General's Criminal Enforcement Division working in concert with the U.S. Secret Service, the Department of Homeland Security, the Illinois State Police, the Barrington Police Department, the West Chicago Police Department, the Cook County Sheriff's office, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police and the Illinois Association of State's Attorneys. The task force will consult with the Illinois Retail Merchants Association, the Magnificent Mile Association, the Chicago Automobile Trade Association, the Internet Association, as well as national retailers including CVS, Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart.

"Organized retail crime is a multibillion-dollar per year industry, but more important than the financial cost is the danger organized retail crime poses to our communities. These brazen, violent crimes are committed by sophisticated criminal organizations that are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other serious crimes. Even during the looting we saw last year, we came to understand that some of these criminal acts were not merely opportunistic, but organized in advance," Raoul said. "The Organized Retail Crime Task Force will allow investigators and prosecutors in my office to better collaborate with our law enforcement partners and ensure cooperation between law enforcement, as well as retailers and online marketplaces, to protect communities, consumers and combat the rise in retail crime."

Organized retail crime has increased dramatically over the last two years. According to the Coalition of Law Enforcement and Retail, organized retail theft accounts for \$45 billion in annual losses. The Wall Street Journal reported that the average professional thief targeting CVS steals \$2,000 in just two minutes. Home Depot's investigations into organized retail crime networks have increased by 86% since 2016. The problem has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Home Depot estimating a 30% increase in thefts. In 2020 Lowe's Home Improvement closed 25 organized retail crime cases amounting to \$1.3 million in losses, compared to 20 cases amounting to \$388,000 in losses in 2019.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin has spearheaded a call for federal action to address organized retail crime by introducing bipartisan Senate legislation, the INFORM Consumers Act, to promote transparency and verification on online marketplaces in order to deter illicit sellers from using the marketplaces to re-sell stolen goods.

“I commend Attorney General Raoul for his initiative to crack down on the growing problem of organized retail crime. Billions of dollars of goods - from cosmetics to medicines to power tools- are stolen each year from retailers and are hawked to unwitting consumers, increasingly through online marketplaces,” Durbin said. “This criminal business model is growing in scale, and we need to increase our efforts to prevent and stop these crimes. In the U.S. Senate, I have introduced bipartisan legislation, the INFORM Consumers Act, to promote transparency and verification on online marketplaces in order to deter shadowy illicit sellers from using these marketplaces to re-sell stolen goods. I look forward to working together with Attorney General Raoul to address this growing problem across all levels of government.”

Organized retail crime and retail fraud can be mistaken for isolated incidents committed by low-level offenders; however, organized crime rings are often behind these incidents. Crime rings connected to the drug trade, human trafficking, and other forms of crime target big box stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, auto dealerships, and other retailers to carry out sophisticated theft operations and operate across county and state borders. Rings coordinate the theft of large amounts of items – using mules including people who are homeless, indigent, or addicted to drugs – that are resold below market value using online marketplaces. The danger of organized crime goes beyond lost revenue. In discussions with the Attorney General’s office, retailers have raised concerns related to the safety of employees who confront thieves or customers who are bystanders to these crimes. Consumer safety is also at risk when expired items, such as baby formula or medicine, are resold online.

Because retail crimes are often coordinated by organized crime outfits, various law enforcement agencies may be investigating the same target in different communities. Without sufficient coordination, both agencies can be lead to believe that they are dealing with isolated actors rather than a pattern of organized crime. Raoul’s task force will, for the first time, facilitate improved collaboration between federal, state, and local law enforcement and retailers, and utilize a wide-ranging approach to stop organized retail crime at the source. Attorney General Raoul’s Organized Retail Crime Task Force will serve as a vehicle allowing multiple jurisdictions to share information and resources.

The task force will allow Raoul’s office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers and partner across jurisdictions with law enforcement agencies to investigate organized retail crimes and trace thefts to the source. Raoul’s goal in establishing the task force is to improve communication among public and private entities and utilize a multifaceted approach to combatting organized retail theft and related criminal activity. For the first time, organized retail crime investigations will not be limited by county lines, ultimately leading to the arrest and prosecution of the organizations responsible.

