

Belleville Man Charged With Organized Retail Theft Of Tools and Electronics

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CHICAGO - Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced criminal charges against a St. Clair County man over the alleged possession, purchase and sale of purported stolen retail merchandise including tools, electronics and lawn equipment in the estimated amount of \$243,000. The charges are the latest resulting from a multi-jurisdictional investigation facilitated by Raoul's [Organized Retail Crime Task Force](#).

Raoul's office charged Christopher D. Odem, 50, of Belleville, Illinois, with Class 2 felony organized retail crime, punishable by up to seven years in prison; two counts of Class 1 felony theft, each punishable by up to 15 years in prison; three counts of Class 2 felony theft, each punishable by up to seven years in prison; Class 3 felony theft, punishable by up to five years in prison; and Class 1 felony money laundering, punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

"The effects of organized retail crime are not limited to any one region of Illinois. Buying and reselling stolen items creates a market that encourages retail crime and makes communities less safe," Raoul said. "Today's charges demonstrate the importance of the collaborative work that my office's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is doing to hold individuals accountable. I would like to thank the Illinois State Police and our law enforcement and retail partners for their help with this investigation."

According to Raoul, Odem knowingly purchased new, in-the-box stolen merchandise. The items, including power tools and electronics, were purportedly stolen from local retailers, and the defendant allegedly purchased them for resale. The charges come out of an investigation that resulted in [charges filed earlier this month](#) against another St. Clair County man who is also accused of possessing, purchasing and intending to sell purported stolen retail merchandise.

The Illinois State Police (ISP) and the Illinois Department of Revenue's (IDOR) Bureau of Criminal Investigations assisted with the investigation.

"Just as ISP investigates gun and drug trafficking, we investigate those trafficking in stolen goods, and we will continue to work with Attorney General Raoul's office to bring them to justice," said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly.

"The economic impact of organized retail crime goes well beyond the retail theft itself," said Illinois Department of Revenue Director David Harris. "It also affects customers by driving up the cost of merchandise, and it results in billions of dollars in lost tax revenue at both the state and federal level."

Attorney General Raoul's [Organized Retail Crime Task Force](#) is the first statewide, 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. The task force allows the office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers, and to 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.

In addition to establishing the task force, Attorney General Raoul initiated legislation to create and specifically define organized retail crime in state law. [The new law](#), signed in 2022, puts in place stronger oversight of online marketplaces to curb actors who exploit these legitimate platforms to illegally sell stolen goods. It also creates a statewide intelligence platform to help retailers and law enforcement agencies better coordinate their enforcement efforts. Additionally, the law requires online marketplaces to verify the identity of high-volume sellers, which will help police outlets used to monetize stolen merchandise. The law also aims to reduce a criminal's ability to avoid prosecution for organized retail crime by allowing any state's attorney where any element of organized retail crime takes place to prosecute the whole crime. The new law also provides the Attorney General's office authority to utilize the statewide grand jury to prosecute organized retail crime. In addition, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million to the Attorney General's office during fiscal year 2023 to award grants to state's attorneys' offices and law enforcement agencies that investigate and prosecute organized retail crime.

The public is reminded the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Assistant Attorneys General Heidi Epperson and Angel VonBokel are prosecuting the case for Raoul's office.