



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

### ***From Festive Cheer to Retail Fear: Addressing Organized Retail Crime***

**December 12, 2023**

Businesses – large and small – across America are increasingly concerned about organized retail crime. On the news, we see luxury stores being targeted by groups of individuals stealing high-value products, but these are not the only targeted businesses. Small businesses, which account for ninety-nine percent of businesses across America, are also impacted by systematic, large-scale theft or fraud by criminal syndicates.

I have long been an advocate for small businesses. While serving on the Committee on Homeland Security, I have consistently tried to facilitate dialogue between the small business community and the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal agencies on how to partner together. I have always believed that public-private partnerships are critical to success - in many endeavors - and they are especially critical to combatting organized retail crime.

Small business owners and employees are everyday Americans who are just trying to serve their communities and make ends meet. Operating a small business is hard enough – owners often do not have the bandwidth or resources to go up against organized criminal rings looking to steal goods. This is where the Federal government can play a vital role.

I am heartened by the relationships that have already been forged between government and the retail industry to combat organized retail crime. I am pleased that under Operation Boiling Point, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) partners with the National Retail Federation (NRF), both of whom are testifying here today.

And on the matter of Federal and State cooperation, I have always been a strong supporter of the Secret Service's National Computer Forensics Institute (NCFI). NCFI trains and equips law enforcement officers and other government employees at the State and local level with the tools to combat cyber and electric crime, which can include retail theft. Last Congress, Committee Democrats led the reauthorization of NCFI (H.R. 7174), which was enacted in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.

So, while I know that the three Federal agencies testifying before us today already understand the need for collaboration on this issue, I am hopeful that today's discussion will foster even stronger relationships. From our conversations with industry representatives in advance of this hearing, there are ways we can help combat organized retail crime.

For example, we need increased public awareness about what organized retail crime is and what it isn't. As the International Council of Shopping Centers said in its written testimony, we are not talking about single individuals stealing as a result of food insecurity, substance abuse or mental health issues, or for personal use. We are talking about methodical criminal enterprises and we need to make sure that distinction is made.

Also, we need more employee education and training. Nothing is more important than physical safety. Objects can be replaced. Human lives cannot. Retailers should be able to look to law enforcement for guidance on how to protect their employees – and their customers – from violence resulting from theft incidents.

I look forward to hearing from our two panels of witnesses today about how we meet these needs and ensure the protection of businesses, the shopping public, and our communities.

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