



Senators George Lang & Michael Rulli
Sponsor Testimony - Senate Bill 223
Senate Judiciary Committee
May 7th, 2024

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you and provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 223, which seeks to establish a statewide organized retail crime task force, and update the Revised Code to better protect retailers and consumers.

Organized retail crime is no small problem. These offenses involve large scale, targeted thefts using methods of coordinated attacks on retailers across our state and country. The groups that commit these offenses can vary in scope and scale, from loosely formed gangs to transnational crime groups that support larger activities.

The impact of organized retail theft on Ohioans is evident right now. According to the National Retail Federations Annual Survey of Loss Prevention Executives, there was a 67% increase reported in organized retail crime events. And the effects of these crimes

are severe. Nearly half of all retailers who were surveyed reported a need to reduce operating hours in response, with over thirty percent saying they were forced to close store locations.

These are the issues that Senate Bill 223 seeks to address. While there is no silver bullet, the FORCE Act will update the Revised Code to better protect retailers and consumers, while targeting large and sophisticated organized theft rings. This is accomplished by allowing us to aggregate offenses and show a clear pattern of behavior that differentiates organized theft from petty shoplifting crimes.

Senate Bill 223 also provides resources for a statewide, real-time information sharing platform to facilitate communication and respond to these events as they occur. This portal will be secure, comply with data privacy laws, and allow for law enforcement and loss prevention executives to better address these crimes.

Lastly, this bill creates a new criminal offense related to engaging in organized retail theft, giving prosecutors additional tools for successful convictions. We have had productive conversations with the Ohio Prosecuting Attorney's Association and look forward to continuing these through the committee process.

The challenge of addressing organized theft can seem daunting, but Senate Bill 223 takes practical first steps in that direction. It

is paramount that any business who operates in Ohio feels that both our regulatory and legal climate are pro-business, and are geared toward keeping both businesses and consumers safe. And by passing this legislation, we will take one more step toward making Ohio the most business-friendly state in the union.

I would like to thank Senator Rulli for joint sponsoring this legislation, and thank the committee for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 223. I am happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.