

April 12, 2023

Chair Timm Ormsby
315 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Ormsby,

The Washington State Attorney General's Office, UFCW, and the WA Retail Association join together to respectfully request that you adopt the proposed Senate operating budget appropriation of \$2.265M (FY 24-25) to fund the work of the Organized Retail Crime Task Force (ORCTF) to help combat sophisticated, multijurisdictional organized retail crimes. The recent rise in organized retail crime hurts Washington businesses, raises prices for consumers who are already burdened by high inflation, and puts frontline retail workers in harms way.

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) convened this task force in 2022 bringing together more than 100 individuals, including representatives from state, local, and federal law enforcement, small and large businesses, and retail workers to identify how best to combat organized retail crime. At the meeting, law enforcement and others expressed a need for additional resources to investigate these sophisticated multijurisdictional crimes that involve groups of individuals stealing products in order to resell them for a profit. An analysis from the Retail Industry Leaders Association estimates Washington retailers lost \$2.7 billion to organized retail crime in 2021.

Task Force participants identified the need for a centralized statewide unit to help combat organized retail crime learning from the work done by similar units in Arizona, Michigan, Illinois, and Utah.

The Senate's budget included \$2.265M and the Governor's budget included \$2.265M (House funded: \$1.13M) for a 10-person unit, including two prosecutors, four investigators, and a data analyst, in order to:

- Handle criminal prosecutions on behalf of local county prosecutors who refer cases to the AGO;
- Assist with local investigations upon the request of the investigative agency;
- Help coordinate multijurisdictional investigations;
- Facilitate communication and coordination among stakeholders and state, local, and federal jurisdictions;
- Analyze data; and
- Continue to convene the Organized Retail Crime Task Force.

With the funding included in the Senate's budget, the AGO will be able to continue convening the Task Force to improve coordination among agencies and assist with investigations and prosecutions.

We appreciate your attention to the need for funding the Task Force. These investments will undoubtedly help workers and Washington's economy. Please fund the Task Force at the Senate's \$2.265M level so that the AGO can continue convening the Organized Retail Crime Task Force, and assist local, state, and federal agencies with investigating and prosecuting cases.

Sincerely,



Joyce Bruce, Office of the Attorney General



Renée Sunde, President/CEO Washington Retail Association



Faye Guenther, President UFCW



CC:

Chair Christine Rolfes
Vice Chair Steve Bergquist
Vice Chair Mia Gregerson
Vice Chair Nicole Macri
Ranking Member Drew Stokesbary
Assistant Ranking Member Kelly Chambers
Assistant Ranking Member Chris Corry
Representative Larry Springer