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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Launches FORCE to Protect Against Retail Theft Crime Sprees



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is fighting back against organized retail theft as 70% of store owners nationwide report an increase in crime over the past year. Most of the high-profile, smash-and-grab cases are taking place outside of Florida in cities like San Francisco, where several multi-day crime sprees disrupted holiday shopping. To prevent lawlessness in Florida and protect retailers and shoppers, Attorney General Moody today launched the Florida Organized Retail Crime Exchange, a first-of-its-kind, statewide task force and a new interactive database to help spot trends, identify suspects and take down massive, organized retail theft rings. The database is designed to bridge the gaps between retailers, law enforcement and prosecutors by allowing shareable, searchable information on incidents of theft statewide.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “We are seeing lawlessness and out-of-control mobs preying on businesses and consumers in major cities outside of Florida, and we will not allow these crime sprees to harm Floridians or our retailers. While we have done a good job of catching and prosecuting major retail theft rings in Florida, the threat is growing, and we must evolve with it.

“As Attorney General, I am always searching for new and innovative ways to combat crime and assist law enforcement in bringing criminals to justice. I am excited to launch the Florida Organized Retail Crime Exchange—a statewide task force and an interactive database bridging together law enforcement, prosecutors, and retailers in an effort to share information on retail crime throughout the state and stop these criminals before they cause more harm.”

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said, “Organized Retail Theft is a huge problem in Florida and across the nation. Our family members, friends, and fellow citizens are being ripped off when they shop—they are being ripped off by thieves every time we make a purchase. How? The organized retail criminal is driving prices higher by systematically and strategically taking advantage of our open and trusting society. I applaud Attorney General Ashley Moody for creating this statewide task force dedicated to investigating and prosecuting Organized Retail Crime. This task force will allow law enforcement and retailers to easily work together and efficiently share information and resources so that we can root out and arrest these thieves, and send them to prison where they belong.”

Florida Retail Federation President and CEO Scott Shalley said, "We are honored to collaborate with Attorney General Ashley Moody and her team on the creation of this ORC task force. Organized retail crime continues to pose a serious threat to retailers, with a significant increase in activity over the past year. FORCE will play a key role in facilitating the collaboration between retail and law enforcement to protect Florida retailers, prevent crime and hold criminals accountable."

The Attorney General’s Office and Florida Retail Federation will operate the database, the TREUTH Florida Organized Retail Crime Exchange, which is available by invitation to retailers and law enforcement agencies that complete specialized training. Through the T-FORCE database, retailers will have the ability to upload data about recent retail theft occurrences. Data, such as items stolen, suspect description, method of operation and vehicle identification organized in T-FORCE, will make it easier to identify a nexus among seemingly single-incident thefts and could lead to organizational charges and increased penalties. Once information is uploaded, other retailers and law enforcement agencies will have access to the information, providing a greater ability to link related crimes and perpetrators.

Through T-FORCE, information about trending retail theft is available to participating retailers and law enforcement agencies across the state. Many organized retail crime rings operate on multi-city hits—targeting similar retailers across broad geographical locations. With T-FORCE, retailers are able to immediately upload information to the database, alerting other businesses with similar merchandise items to the incident and providing suspect and vehicle descriptions. On top of alerting other retailers to active crime rings, uploading information will help law enforcement better connect the dots between criminal theft operations and even identify potential upcoming targeted locations.

Ultimately, Attorney General Moody’s Office of Statewide Prosecution hopes the implementation of T-FORCE will limit duplication of resources from multiple investigations across the state. This will allow prosecutors to bring stronger cases and increase penalties for leaders of organized retail theft rings, as well as stop the occurrence of multiple investigations across the state. By connecting cases, law enforcement agencies will have the ability to consolidate investigations. This will allow prosecutors to bring stronger cases and stiffer penalties to members of organized theft rings.

Attorney General Moody's launch of the FORCE task force is made up of law enforcement, prosecutors and retailers to target organized retail theft and to use the data from the secure online portal. The task force will meet regularly to discuss trends, share criminal intelligence and

coordinate investigations—working together to stop organized retail theft in Florida.

According to the National Retail Federation, organized retail theft costs businesses in Florida and across the United States an estimated $30 billion every year. Since taking office in 2019, Attorney General Moody's OSP has filed nearly 60 cases involving more than 250 individuals suspected of organized retail theft or crimes related to organized retail theft. FORCE will help bolster these ongoing efforts.