



December 2, 2025

**Hearing Before the House Committee on Small Business on “The Impact of Crime on America’s Small Businesses,” December 2, 2025 [Docket No. XXXX]**

To the Members of the House Committee on Small Business:

My name is Tom Wickham. I am a Vice President and Managing Director of Government Affairs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I have been at the U.S. Chamber since 2021. From 1995 through 2021, I served in the House Parliamentarian’s Office where I had the honor of advising many of you on your constitutional and institutional responsibilities.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world’s largest business organization, representing companies of all sizes, including small and mid-sized businesses. We also have local chambers of commerce and leading industry associations as members. The Chamber serves as the voice of American business in Washington, across the country, and around the globe. Since 2021, I have visited communities throughout the country meeting with policymakers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and businesses to find solutions to the complex problems of crimes against businesses. The U.S. Chamber is committed to working with this committee and small businesses to combat crime and its negative impact on communities.

While higher-profile crimes and finger-pointing grab the headlines, small businesses continue to struggle with rising business-focused crimes. Retail crimes like organized shoplifting rings and “smash-and-grabs” have been persistent problems for America’s businesses. Crime numbers often fluctuate from year-to-year but the long-term trends are clear with larcenies involving shoplifting having doubled since the 1970’s according to statistics from the nonprofit Council for Criminal Justice. The effect of retail crime is widespread with innocent customers, employees, and business owners bearing the financial and societal costs. Retail crime creates higher prices for consumers, results in stores having to close their doors, and communities left without vital goods and services.

Cargo theft is another rising concern for the business community. Cargo theft is increasing rapidly with a significant shift toward sophisticated fraud and deception tactics. Cargo theft results in higher costs throughout the supply chain ultimately impacting small business shippers and retailers. The latest numbers from CargoNet show a 13% increase in theft incidents in the second quarter of 2025 over 2024 following record-high numbers of cargo theft incidents in 2023 and 2024. Unfortunately, Texas is at the center of the problem with Texas, Illinois, and California

as the top three states for cargo theft with 53% of incidents occurring in those three states.

Crimes against small businesses are not just a matter of national statistics but affect all businesses at the local level. Hrag Kalabjian will testify to the continued crime problems plaguing his family-run coffee shop in California. Hrag is a member of the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Council where unfortunately these stories are all too common and often include businesses in Texas. According to a 2024 study led by the Texas Comptroller's Office, organized retail theft (ORT) cost businesses in the state of Texas over \$421 million annually. These skyrocketing costs are in addition to the mental impact on the small business owner and employees and the surrounding business community. Here is just a short list of recent incidents in and around the 25<sup>th</sup> District.

- In June, three Waco small businesses were broken into causing significant damage and closure for multiple days.
- In April, thieves broke into a Waco electronic repair shop and stole \$10,000 worth of equipment.
- In June, a Mesquite gym owner was robbed of \$5000 after criminals followed him from a bank.

The U.S. Chamber has summoned policymakers and the business community to join us in our three-part call to action for **improved coordination, aggregation, and prosecution** in combating crimes against businesses.

### **Coordination of response**

Improved coordination between different levels of government can be served by Congress passing the Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (H.R. 2853/S. 1404). This bipartisan bicameral bill establishes a coordination center within the Homeland Security Investigations division of the Department of Homeland Security to increase collaboration in the multi-jurisdictional fight against retail crime. In this Congress, the bill has also been expanded to address the problem of cargo theft. At the local level, coordination of small businesses to combat crime can occur under the umbrella of a local chamber of commerce like successful efforts of the New Mexico Chamber of Commerce's Organized Retail Crime Association or the Ohio Chamber's Crime Task Force.

### **Aggregation of offenses**

One of the greatest challenges to small businesses is the increasing sophistication of criminal operations. These highly-organized gangs exploit the laws of a given jurisdiction to maximize their thefts and minimize their chances for arrest and

prosecution. Thieves accomplish this by repeatedly stealing *just* below the felony threshold during each theft, with multiple thefts often committed across jurisdictional lines and often against the same stores again and again. Small businesses are continually frustrated by two words: “repeat offenders.” The Chamber has worked with state policymakers and prosecutors like San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan and the National District Attorney’s Association to change laws to create a separate offense for the repeated stealing of certain amounts within specific time periods. We appreciate this committee’s support in passing aggregation laws in all 50 states.

### **Increased prosecution**

Crucial to any anti-crime response is the local prosecutor. District Attorneys and County Attorneys are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, deciding whether arrested parties will be prosecuted. Lax prosecution of crimes against businesses sends the wrong message to small business owners and communities, and only emboldens criminals. The U.S. Chamber supports legislation reducing the case backlog for state and local courts, thereby freeing up prosecutors’ ability to address current crimes.

Crimes spanning multiple jurisdictions pose a logistical and manpower problem for prosecutors, but progress is underway. State legislatures should follow the lead of Pennsylvania, where a law supported by the Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce created a new office of Deputy Attorney General for Organized Retail Crime Theft last year. In just over one year, that office has opened over 65 investigations, made more than 40 arrests, and recovered nearly \$2 million in stolen goods.

The U.S. Chamber stands ready to partner with this committee to pass effective laws and policies to combat crime and ensure our communities are safe.

I am happy to take any questions you may have.