

Washington State Attorney General Ferguson's Organized Retail Crime Press Conference Transcript

12:00pm, June 23, 2022 — Seattle, Washington

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Thank you so. Thank you so much. And thanks to all of you for being here on this beautiful day. We really appreciate it. And to those on the phone as well, we appreciate your interest. Today I'm announcing that my office is convening a statewide organized retail crime task force. The task force will improve coordination and collaboration among law enforcement agencies.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

And through enhanced coordination, we will better combat these multi-jurisdictional crimes that endanger employees. The public and cause significant economic harm to our state. The task force will include local, state and federal law enforcement representatives including the FBI and the U.S. attorney. So you'll be hearing from very shortly. It'll include county prosecutors, including a prosecutor from my office. It'll include retail partners, small business representatives and worker representatives.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

They are all represented here today. And you'll be hearing from them this morning. I'm very proud to be joined by a large group, as you can see, a large group of leaders who I look forward to working with on the task force and individuals. You'll specifically be hearing from this morning are Bellevue Police Chief Wendell Shirley, Washington Retail Association President Renée Sunde, UFCW 3000 President Faye Guenther, U.S. Attorney Nick Brown and U.S. attorney Vanessa Waldref.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

And they'll speak in that order So shortly I'll hand the podium to these leaders so they can share their perspectives on this challenge and about the upcoming work of the task force. I'm going to keep my remarks brief, but I do want to talk about organized retail crime, which, as you probably know, involves a group of individuals that steal products not for their own personal profit, but to resell them for a profit.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

These stolen goods are often sold on the online marketplace. And I'll talk more about the risks and dangerous inherent with that shortly. Here's what we're not focused on today for this conversation. We're not talking today about general retail crimes like petty theft shoplifting or

poverty driven crimes. We're talking about sophisticated organized crime rings that account for almost \$70 billion dollars in retail losses.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Across the United States. 70 billion. An analysis from the Retail Industry Leaders Association estimates that Washington retailers lost \$2.7 billion to organized retail crime in 2021 alone, 2.7 billion in 2021 alone in Washington State. So let me give you just one example of how this organized crime impacts Washingtonians all across our state. As you probably know, a baby formula shortage is impacting families across our country.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

And here in Washington. It's no surprise that baby formula is a common target for thieves. In fact, even before the shortage, which is making headlines baby formula has been identified as one the most common items to be stolen from stores. That's according to a 2020 National Retail Foundation Organized Retail Crime Survey. These thieves become resellers in online marketplaces.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

That means that parents who unwittingly buy stolen formula on the secondary market may be putting their babies at significant risk if the thieves, for example, fail to store the product at the appropriate temperatures, or if the thieves may manipulate the packaging, such as changing the expiration date. And that's just one example. And you hear others from the other speakers.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

In short, organized retail crime is a state wide problem demanding a statewide solution. That's why I'm convening the statewide task force. They'll bring law enforcement prosecutors and retailers together to share information to combat the significant and growing problem. This is the first effort of its kind here in Washington State. I'm aware of about nine other states that have a task force dedicated organized retail crime.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

It's time for Washington to engage in a similar effort. Our first meeting will be on July 7 and as we're chatting just before coming in this room, I'm just so appreciative of everybody here their organizations, their employees, their workers, who are all stepping up to address what really is a true crisis in our state that has significant implications for businesses and for the people of our state.

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Renée Sunde

Well, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Renée Sunde, president and CEO of the Washington Retail Association. And first and foremost, I'd like to thank Attorney General Ferguson and his team for their outstanding efforts in bringing together key partners to form an AG led statewide task force to combat organized retail crime. Joining us here today from my team are Mark Johnson, senior vice president of policy and government affairs, who also serves on the Washington Organized Retail Crime Association.

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Renée Sunde

Board. And John Engber, the director of the Retail Industry Coalition of Seattle. Also here today are a number of our retail partners who work in the areas of security, loss prevention and asset protection. Joining us here today, if you don't mind, just doing a little bit of a wave, our Robert Nelson with Loews, who also serves as president of the Washington Organized Retail Crime Association.

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Renée Sunde

Paul Tucker with Loews. Jerry Lerum with the Home Depot Steven Thomas, as well as Jose Barretto with Walgreens, Bryan Wiles, Travis Forbush and Steuart Markley with Nordstrom's Carl Kleinknecht with the Kemper Development Company and the Bellevue Collection. Terry Mullen with CVS. Dennis Lamborn with The Gap. Inc.. Michael Brown with Rite Aid. Alexander Deloye with Target. And Sandra Englund, who is the executive director of the Korean Americans Grocers Association.

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Renée Sunde

I want to thank you all for your important work that you do on behalf of the retail industry and for your commitment to working together to support the important work of this task force. There has never been a more critical time in Washington State to address the impacts of organized retail crime on public safety and the safety of our customers and our retail employees.

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Renée Sunde

Over the past months, stories of organized theft have been on the forefront of virtually every media channel across the US, including major retailers and grocers everywhere. And many of our small businesses have been a target as well. As the retail industry recovers from the pandemic and workforce challenges remain. Organized retail crime has become a top issue for our members.

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Renée Sunde

While criminals have become more brazen, more violent in their attacks on retail stores across the state This threat to personal safety has impacted the mental well-being of our employees.

And many of our frontline retail workers have witnessed these outrageous crimes in action and even face physical threats themselves. To be clear, and we heard this earlier, we are not talking about shoplifting.

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Renée Sunde

Instead, organized retail crime is the monetizing of stolen products that are often used to fund even much more egregious criminal activity that may include human trafficking, weapons sales, drug trafficking and terrorism. These organized rings often specialize in array of high value and easy defense products. The range from, as mentioned earlier, baby formula to over-the-counter medications, cosmetics and power tools to electronics designer clothing and accessories and even Lego toys.

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Renée Sunde

Coordinated attacks are usually multiple events by two or more people in multiple jurisdictions. These groups then sell the merchandise either through online marketplaces or businesses that actually look legitimate and operate in plain sight. As more thefts are turning violent and even deadly in our stores. This multibillion dollar problem has led to increased prices for shoppers while facing record inflation, loss of tax revenue for cities and counties, as well as product shortages

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Renée Sunde

as we recover from the pandemic. While several surveys have attempted to measure the impacts of RC, most estimate that the total national impact is around \$69 billion annually. According to the National Retail Federation, 75% of retailers said that they saw an increase in organized retail crime since 2020. In Washington State the grocery industry alone has experienced hundreds of millions in annual losses which have put in jeopardy the viability of some grocery stores. Although retailers have spent millions to beef up their loss prevention and in-store security, these investments alone cannot solve this problem.

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Renée Sunde

These efforts have been highly effective. Actually, I wanted to say that during the past couple of years, and this was mentioned earlier, that several states did launch their own organized retail crime task force, and these efforts have been very effective in prosecuting several multimillion dollar cases. The task force itself is an effective tool for sharing information, coordinating efforts among state and local law enforcement, prosecutors, retailers, and policymakers at multiple levels of government and addressing the fencing of stolen products sold through online marketplaces is going to be critical to removing the incentives to commit the thefts in the first place.

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Renée Sunde

As retailers have done in other states, Washington retail members will provide investigative resources to the task force, and our expertise on this critical issue. Mark Johnson on my team serves as an ORC expert in our state and will be available to answer questions today on the impact and growth in retail crime. I want to say thank you again to Attorney General Ferguson and fellow partners here today.

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Renée Sunde

The formation of this task force sends a very strong message that we are all dedicated to the shared goal of building safer communities and retailers stand ready to help in achieving this goal. Thank you.

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Faye Guenthere

My name is Faye Guenthere and I'm the president of UFCW 3000. Our union represents over 50,000 members in grocery, retail as well as health care and cannabis and other industries across the state of Washington, and Idaho and in parts of Oregon. Many of you know our frontline essential workers because you've been shopping during the pandemic. Folks have been in the grocery stores, in the drugstores.

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Faye Guenthere

Our members have been taking care of everyone and making making sure that they're fed during the pandemic. During the pandemic, they went to work and faced a a virus that they were worried was going to they were to take home to their families. But they also faced something else, which was this organized retail crime every single day.

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Faye Guenthere

And right now, our essential workers need all of our help. They need all of us to be coming together like this because it is not safe. It's not safe for the workers, and it's not safe for the customers, and it's not safe for our community to have organized retail crime ravaging our stores. The organized retail crime, it's targeting our grocery stores.

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Faye Guenthere

We have Safeway, we have Fred Meyers, we have QFC, I see, we I see a PCC bag right there. We have Bartell's, we have Rite Aid. And these folks are coming in and just taking stuff, thousands of dollars of stuff off of the grocery shelves or off the shelves, including Macy's. Just going in. I've seen it with my own eyes.

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Faye Guenthere

I have seen the warehouse is filled with these goods. It looks like a Fred Meyer warehouse or a Safeway warehouse. It is absolutely it's absolutely unacceptable. This harms all of us. And it should be an issue that can unite us—customers, essential workers and employers alike. This is an issue that I think can break through some of the rhetoric and make sure that we're all standing together and making sure that our workplaces are safe.

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Faye Guenthere

Our communities are safe. I want to thank Attorney General Ferguson for taking this threat seriously and convening this task force. I look forward to working with this group to ensure that worker, the voice of workers like those currently represented by UFCW 3000 and any other workers who are going to join UFCW 3000, all get the representation that they deserve.

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Faye Guenthere

Our members care deeply about their jobs. They care about their coworkers. They care about their customers. When organized crime comes in to our workplaces, it puts all of us at risk. No one should be placed in harm's way when they're are made to feel in danger. When they're buying or stocking shelves in grocery stores. And there are solutions.

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Faye Guenthere

This task force is a critical part, but another key step is removing online platforms that launder stolen goods for profit. Amazon and other online retailers need to step up and ensure stolen goods are not sold on their platforms. If eBay can do it, so can Amazon. Attorney General Bob Ferguson knows how to advocate for consumers and workers and has a strong record of holding corporations accountable, accountable when they do wrong, as does our union.

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Faye Guenthere

I look forward to working with this task force to find solutions for our frontline essential workers to ensure that we can restore safety in our workplaces, safety in our communities, and make sure our families can go into the grocery store and not be the target of organized retail crime. So thank you very much, and I look forward to the work that we are going to do.

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Nick Brown

Good afternoon. My name is Nick Brown. I'm the United States attorney for the Western District of Washington. I want to add my thanks to Attorney General Ferguson for gathering this group and all the people that support this group together today. And Bob, it's good to have another press conference with you. It's been a while since we've been doing this, this sort of thing.

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Nick Brown

Any time you have a criminal justice challenge or a priority, they are best solved when people collaborate and communicate and share their resources together. And that is exactly what you're seeing today and that is exactly what you're seeing in Attorney General Ferguson's task force. So I'm very appreciative for the AG's office for leading this effort and for bringing this group together.

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Nick Brown

Number two, I want to highlight that this is a serious problem. And for all the reasons that other speakers have mentioned and has the full attention of my office and of my counterpart in the Eastern District, Washington, and all of our federal law enforcement officials as well. And the reason it has the attention of the federal government is in addition to the impact that you've heard already today, organized retail theft is a tool.

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Nick Brown

It is a tool used by criminal organizations who do a myriad of other types of crime. It is a tool for people who traffic in drugs, is a tool for people who engage in larger cyber fraud and wire fraud and economic crimes. It is a tool for organizations that are engaged in violence. This is one of the ways that those organizations have an impact on our community.

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Nick Brown

And I can assure you that not only our offices and the Department of Justice, but our law enforcement partners in the FBI and HSI are working on this issue and will continue to do more of these sorts of cases. And I just want to highlight that the reason we want to address this problem, for all the reasons that you've already heard today, is that we all want to live and safe and healthy and vibrant communities and safe and healthy, vibrant communities depend on having workers that feel safe when they go to work, businesses that feel safe, that law enforcement will do everything they can to protect their businesses and customers who walk into stores, who

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Nick Brown

want to feel safe while they're shopping individually or with their families and organized retail theft it does damage and is a threat to that safety. And that is why we will continue to work on this. So thank you again to Attorney General Ferguson. Thank you to all the partners here today for partnering with our offices on this effort.

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Nick Brown

And I'm excited about what the task force can accomplish. Thank you very much.

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Vanessa Waldref

Good afternoon. My name is Vanessa Waldron, and I am the United States attorney for the Eastern District of Washington. And I also want to extend my thanks to Attorney General Ferguson for inviting me and my colleague Nick Brown, to give a federal perspective of the ways that we're seeing organized retail crime and how it intersects with some of our federal priorities and keeping our communities safe.

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Vanessa Waldref

Fraud and this type of organized crime devastates our community's limited resources. We've heard today about some of the violence that can occur in our retail stores. And we have seen concerning robberies, especially in pharmacies that can intersect with of our priorities around drug crimes and seeing opioids that are then brought into our communities for distribution. And these are, again, not at shoplifting quantities for individual users, but at distribution quantities.

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Vanessa Waldref

So those types of crimes that are seen in our retail stores, retail pharmacies, are desperately impacting our communities with the influx of more opioid and creating more addiction problems that lead to violent crimes as well. So we're seeing it in that context for pharmacies. And we're also seeing organized crime by sophisticated actors who seek to defraud vulnerable individuals for their own profit schemes.

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Vanessa Waldref

Federal charges brought by my office can be a powerful tool to combat counterfeit schemes which have we've seen proliferate on the dark web and have intersections with this type of organized crime.

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Vanessa Waldref

Another example is that we see counterfeiters. So counterfeit money can be purchased on the dark web and then brought into our retail stores. That money can then be used to launder, be laundered essentially by returning items for cash, by purchasing items that then are resold on the dark web or on online mechanisms. Or there's further gift cards that are purchased using counterfeit currency that then can be sold on the dark web or on online forums.

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Vanessa Waldref

These all create problems for our entire community. They create cost increases for consumers who are trying to stretch their dollars like all of us are, to support our families and support our communities. And they cause a lot of impact for our retail stores. And we've heard about the

devastating impact that it has on our workers. So these crimes are absolutely impacting our community in a variety of ways.

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Vanessa Waldref

And we see that in the counterfeiting process. And then the schemes that can also involve identity theft. So when you're buying illicit items on the dark web, there are also organized crime schemes that buy identities and have gift cards that can be loaded up with fraudulent credit card information. Identity theft, wire fraud, this type of theft of credit card information all has significant impacts on Washington residents, both in the prices that we see in the stores and in your life if you're trying to recover after your identity theft has been stolen.

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Vanessa Waldref

My office and our federal partners are focused on combating these fraud events and these fraudsters who take advantage of our community for their own financial benefit. Unlawful resale undercuts small businesses. It hurts consumers and it makes profits, it makes products more expensive for all of us. And I'm proud of my office's white collar and fraud team who are the leaders in taking on these counterfeit and fraud cases.

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Vanessa Waldref

But also our organized crime and drug attorneys who are seeing this type of interaction also impacting our efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and the influx of drugs into our communities.

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Vanessa Waldref

We are trying to work as quickly as possible in a lot of these schemes to take the assets back from individuals who have stolen these goods and make sure that we can have the money come back to victims of the crimes. So I want to thank everyone who is here again. I'm very excited about the opportunity to collaborate, and I agree with everyone who's spoken to the benefits of having a collaborative effort on this.

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Vanessa Waldref

This is exactly the type of local state and federal partnership where we can work together to ensure that our Washington residents are safe and are economically secure. Thank you.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Thanks for listening to all of our speakers who I think did a wonderful job of really detailing the extent of the problems that result from organized retail crime. And just one last point I'll make

for opening up to questions is that, you know, I think you got a sense from the speakers of how big the challenge is. And what I want to emphasize is no

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

one of us, right? No one retail store, no one prosecutor, no one attorney general, no one U.S. attorney can solve the problem. It's just way too big economically for workers, for the public, for public safety. It's way too big. And that's why it seemed important to me and to all of us here to bring our resources together, to share information, to work together, to address what really is a huge, huge challenge.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

I think they you're the one who said, which I which I appreciated was, you know, the challenge impacts everybody and also unites us all as well. For that reason, which I think sums it up really well, it does impact everybody in our state. And therefore, we need to be united in our attempts to, from all our different perspectives that we have and the different rules that we have,

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

to address this challenge. So I'll do now is start with questions here in the room of folks have it. And then for those on the phone, what I will do is I will do my best to repeat the question just so you can hear it. And and speakers will do our best to reintroduce ourselves. We come back up

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

so those on the phone know who, who's asking, who knows who's answering the question. Go right ahead.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

So I'll just repeat the question and turn to others who who may have a perspective on that. So the question went to is part of the problem the view that stores are not stopping folks from leaving the store with the stolen goods and and more being done essentially on the front end I think is the way. Yep.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Yep. Taking advantage of that policy. So I'll turn to others who are dealing with this on a daily basis. That's OK. And again, watch your step, everybody. So, Mark, are you taking this one Hi.

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Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson, senior vice president of policy and government affairs for the Washington Retail Association, also serve as government affairs chairman for the Organized Retail Crime Association of Washington. It's a great question. Thank you for that. So what stores, what retailers have to balance out is the risk of a customer getting injured or killed, an employee getting injured or killed or even the perpetrator the suspect getting injured or killed.

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Mark Johnson

Is it worth it for that product that they may lose? And I would have to contend that there is no product or amount of product that can really replace that individual that may be hurt. I had the unfortunate experience of witnessing in a retail establishment in my hometown of Olympia, a theft going on as I'm checking out. And I said, "that person is stealing those backpacks! Are you going to stop them?"

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Mark Johnson

They go, "it's not worth me not going home tonight to my family. To chase them out in the parking lot. They could be armed, they could have a weapon. I could get hurt. I could get bear sprayed, stabbed, shot. Any of those things could happen." So the retailers out there that have a hands off policy, they really have to consider the implications of what could be the cause and what could hurt either the thief the customer or the employee.

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Wendell Shirley

Very quickly, I just want to add to what we just said. From a law enforcement perspective. We do not encourage the loss prevention officers who are basically not armed. Right? Not trained exclusively in this type of issue to begin to use physical force to try and detain somebody from stealing something. Because the only thing that's going to happen with that is some of the things that was just said.

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Wendell Shirley

Right? And and people get injured and hurt trying to defend to protect property. And it's just not worth it. So from a law enforcement perspective, we agree with them 100%. It's not worth it at that point.

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Faye Guenthere

But just from a worker's perspective, I mean, I had a worker workers do not want to see this stuff getting stolen. They care about their employers. They have a lot of pride in their work. I had a Rite Aid worker pursue somebody who sold cigarettes and ended up falling and dying. We do not want our members being put in harm's way.

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Faye Guenthere

This is not worker's fault that organized retail crime are inside these stores. And so we tell our members who are making \$20 an hour or something like that, you didn't get trained just like you were saying. You didn't get trained you don't have weapons. These folks have guns. They have weapons, and they are inside of our facilities. I would not put any worker I would not ask any UFCW 3000 member to pursue somebody who isn't who is a criminal and it's not safe for them.

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Faye Guenthere

And it's not fair to frontline essential workers who already do so much for our community.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

I mean, maybe something I'll have to add to that is, I think all of you said it well, is that that's not where the onus is, right? On folks to take on someone who they have no idea what weapon or weapons they have. And you know to say from personal experience I went to law school in New York.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

I was walking home from a late night. The library once two guys stopped me on a dark stretch of it in the middle of night and one of my wallet and and I said no, which is about the stupidest thing I could have done. I just I was surprised. I just said, no and resisted. And, you know, I got beat up for that and hurt pretty bad.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

I frankly, I was lucky when I look back on, I was lucky. I walked away from it honestly, relatively walked away from it. And lost my wallet at the end. I've learned my lesson on that. So to expect any worker in any store in that situation to know. And so with that knowledge, that's why it's even more incumbent on all of us to share resources, do all we can to catch those folks, hold them accountable, and and stop that from happening in the first place.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Yeah. So the question I'll just repeat it is goes to with the task force, what changes might there be, right. As a result of the task force working together? So I will start, but obviously we welcome others who will share their perspectives as well. So number one, what I would say is that each one of us and the groups of workers we represent touch on one piece of this.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

Right? And to my point earlier, no one of us can solve it or even effectively address it. Right. And so because this is an issue that transcends some random county border or city border or even state border for that matter, you know, by definition putting us all in the room together or we're exchanging information about what we're experiencing and sharing the resources and talking about the resources that we have.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

We have some resources my office, right when it comes to criminal prosecution, not as much as maybe another prosecutor's office, but we have something we can offer to bring to the table. But sharing that information I found in my experience, I'm working with Task Force in other context, that the sharing of that information helps with enforcement, helps with prevention, reason of profiling issue and getting folks in the room to make sure we go after the bad guys hold them accountable, and provide the resources we need to help retailers and small businesses who are dealing with this challenge.

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A.G. Bob Ferguson

I'll let others weigh in on that as well who want to jump in.

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Renée Sunde

I would just add that I think the task force is sort of like putting a line in the sand, even though we're focused on the really big cases that might be going on, that without the coordination or not being halted. I think by taking this line in the sand, putting this line in the sand, what it does is it deters thefts and criminals that are maybe not organized, fully organized, but it certainly says that this type of behavior is not acceptable.

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Renée Sunde

And so I think by working together, it begins to create a narrative that says we don't want to live in our communities like this anymore. We don't want to shop where we're afraid. We don't want to go to work and be scared. We want it—we need to stop this behavior in the state of Washington. And by working together, I think through the task force, it will have an impact on that, on that narrative.

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Vanessa Waldref

So I can speak to how there are so many benefits in terms of law enforcement efforts when there are members of the table from local, state and federal law enforcement. A good example of a partnership that can be really effective in combating this type of crime is our local police departments are the ones on the ground that will be responding to an incident at a retail store.

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Vanessa Waldref

But our Federal Bureau of Investigation agents would be able to know if there were, you know, a pattern of activities that are connected to criminal online actions which often occur interstate or even internationally. And so being able to combine our efforts and share information effectively really allows us to take down larger organized crime syndicates and ensure that smaller events don't turn into even larger criminal activity.

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Vanessa Waldref

So both in the deterrent effect, as well as in responding to crime and ensuring that we're getting all the bad actors to most effectively serve the community.

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Wendell Shirley

One thing I like to add in terms of from a local law enforcement perspective, right from Bellevue here, task forces are very important because no one agency, as I said earlier, can deal with this alone. Right. And people that decide to commit these crimes they have no jurisdiction or boundaries. So they'll go from Bellevue to Redmond to wherever else.

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Wendell Shirley

Right. And so this task force coming together allows us to share information, share investigative information as well. And I think as you can see from this task force, I'm from law enforcement in Bellevue, but we have many of our private security corporations here in partnership. And I can tell you, in the city of Bellevue, it's something we take very seriously.

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Wendell Shirley

We work very closely with our private security companies such as campus security, Nordstrom, excuse me, Home Depot, you name it. And that partnership and communication is key to helping solve this problem.

00;30;39;59 - 00;30;54;25

Carl Kleinknecht

Yeah. Carl Kleinknecht, director of security with the Bellevue Collection in downtown Bellevue. We have been asking for a task force like this for several months. We have noticed that the tentacles of crime are far reaching, goes way beyond the county.

00;30;54;45 - 00;31;33;25

Carl Kleinknecht

It goes up and down the I-5 corridor. And we will often have malls as far south as Northern California asking us if we are familiar with certain suspects that have done wholesale thieving from their property. Oftentimes we are. The the gap that we've seen is who do we contact in the private security sector to take that lead and work it up into a case that can be filed so that

we can assure that accountability is the end result of our efforts and so this task force has been a long time coming, and we are very optimistic that we can start down a pathway of accountability.

00;31;34;24 - 00;31;52;21

Faye Guenthere

I just want to echo UFCW 3000 has been asking for a task force—Sarah Turner, shout her out—we've been pressing for some solution and a place where we can work with the employer, community and Safeway and the loss prevention folks with Safeway have been working with us. That's how I saw the warehouses. So we've been trying to figure out ways we can partner.

00;31;52;21 - 00;32;04;05

Faye Guenthere

And I just was going to I was thinking about Attorney General Ferguson's record. He doesn't lose very much and he doesn't put together a useless task force. So I think that to your question, I think that we'll see some real solutions out of this.

00;32;04;39 - 00;32;19;17

A.G. Bob Ferguson

OK, so I appreciate every who's joining him by phone. And just as we wrap up, folks are available to chat one on one with you. If you have questions or want to talk with individuals about their personal experience. We're obviously available for that. And just that just as a final thought is two final thoughts. One, thanks to all of you.

00;32;19;42 - 00;32;47;49

A.G. Bob Ferguson

You know, we just greatly appreciate it. And I think your presence here today and the organization that you represent, I think does send a signal to our state that this is something we are all taking very seriously. We'll do everything we can to address and to bring accountability to this issue. Number two, you know, I think there can be a temptation for a Washingtonian to turn on the news and see an example of retail theft going on the news and think, you know what, that doesn't impact me.

00;32;48;19 - 00;33;08;35

A.G. Bob Ferguson

You know, they feel bad for what happened, that store. But I think there's a temptation think it doesn't impact me. And the realities I think you've heard today is it does impact you. It impacts everybody in different ways, to be sure, but impacts all of us economically for workers, for our economy, for people who try to buy products, safe products, online, you name it.

00;33;09;31 - 00;33;24;34

A.G. Bob Ferguson

The tentacles of this organized retail crime, they're extensive and they impact all Washingtonians. And that's why it's gonna take a statewide effort to get our arms around it and

to address it and to bring accountability. So thanks to all of you for being here so much. Thanks to you, the media who are here today. And we're happy to take any questions one-on-one.

00;33;24;35 - 00;33;25;20

A.G. Bob Ferguson

Thanks so much, everybody.