



BEST PRACTICES FOR COMBATTING ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME

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Introduction

Organized retail crime (ORC) is a growing and complex challenge that impacts retailers, employees, consumers, and communities alike. From organized shoplifting rings to large-scale fraud, ORC undermines business operations, increases costs, reduces revenue, and jeopardizes the safety of many. Addressing this issue requires a proactive, multi-faceted public-private partnership that combines strategy, technology, and collaboration.

Building on Challenge Seattle and the Washington Retail association's prior report—"[A Public-Private Partnership to Defeat Organized Retail Crime](#)"—this report outlines best practices for retailers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and city officials for tackling organized retail crime effectively. Drawing on industry insights and proven methods, it provides actionable strategies to deter and respond to ORC. Whether you are a retail leader, loss prevention professional, law enforcement officer, prosecutor, or policymaker, these recommendations will help you be more effective in preventing ORC and holding those who are responsible accountable.

Acknowledgments

The best practices in this report incorporate insights from Mayor Mary Lou Pauly (City of Issaquah), Chief Cherie Harris (Kirkland Police Department), Undersheriff Jesse Anderson (King County Sheriff's Office), Deputy Attorney General Todd Bowers (Office of the Washington Attorney General), and President and CEO Renée Sunde (Washington Retail Association). It also incorporates the previously shared input and guidance from the Bellevue Police Department, Homeland Security Investigations, Kemper Development Company, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Lowe's, Microsoft, Nordstrom, NW Grocery Association, REI, Retail Industry Leaders Association, Seattle Police Department, Target, Tukwila Police Department, Westfield Southcenter, and Washington Organized Retail Crime Association.

Cross-Cutting Best Practices for Combating ORC



Enhance Communication Across All Stakeholders

Effective communication between law enforcement, retailers, and prosecutors through regular meetings is essential to share updates on cases, identify offender patterns, and discuss emerging trends. Regular meetings also help ensure role clarity and identify the best ways to disrupt and prevent ORC. Stakeholders should utilize real-time information-sharing platforms, such as Auror, to coordinate efforts and streamline communication. Clear channels between prosecutors, law enforcement, and retailers ensure accountability with timely consultation on plea deals, charging decisions, and sentencing recommendations.

Establish Strong Public-Private Partnerships

Trust and collaboration among retailers, law enforcement, and prosecutors are foundational to combating ORC. Law enforcement should build relationships with retailers by getting to know managers and security teams while encouraging consistent crime reporting. Prosecutors should establish clear communication lines and

engagement with retailers and law enforcement. Strong relationships underpin the feedback loops necessary to proactively address ORC. For example, while law enforcement may not have the resources to respond immediately to every report of retail theft, a positive working relationship between local beat officers and a store's manager and security team can facilitate follow-up and ensure everyone is working collaboratively to combat further instances of ORC.

Prioritize Crime Reporting and Law Enforcement Response

Retailers must commit to reporting all ORC incidents to law enforcement. If immediate response by law enforcement is not feasible, follow-ups should occur within 24 hours to demonstrate accountability. Timely reporting and law enforcement engagement are critical to aggregating crimes across jurisdictions, building strong cases against habitual offenders, and establishing a full understanding of the magnitude and nature of ORC.

Recognize Retailers as Victims and Key Partners in Investigations and Prosecutions

Retailers play a pivotal role as partners in ORC investigations and prosecutions. They should be recognized and trusted as victims of a crime. Thus they should be consulted on plea agreements and involved in pretrial processes, the trial itself, and sentencing. This partnership fosters trust, increases accountability, and strengthens the collective ability to combat ORC effectively.

Inform the Public and Policymakers

Educating the public and policymakers about the impact of ORC is crucial for building the support needed to empower law enforcement and prosecutors. Stakeholders should continue to highlight the financial, social, and safety consequences of ORC and encourage the public not to purchase fenced goods. Similarly, sharing data-driven insights and real-world case studies with policymakers can underscore the need for continued focus, policy intervention, and resources.

While cross-cutting strategies provide a strong foundation for combating ORC, each set of key stakeholders—retailers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and local government officials—play a distinct but interconnected role in addressing ORC, from prevention and investigation to prosecution and policymaking. The following sections outline targeted best practices designed to enhance the effectiveness of individual stakeholders while reinforcing collaborative efforts. By executing these recommendations, stakeholders can better align their strategies, share resources, and collectively disrupt organized retail crime networks.

Best Practices for Retailers

Report Retail Theft: Report all theft events to law enforcement. Regardless of immediate response, timely, accurate reporting of crimes allows law enforcement to identify repeat offenders and trends and policymakers to understand the scope and extent of ORC, as well as its impact.

Keep Employees Informed and Safe: Retailers should prioritize employee safety and awareness through regular training and clear communication protocols. Training programs should equip employees with knowledge on recognizing signs of ORC, de-escalation techniques, and the proper procedures for reporting incidents. Retailers should also establish and enforce clear policies that prioritize employee safety. Providing ongoing updates about emerging threats and security measures fosters a culture of vigilance and ensures employees feel supported and prepared to handle potential ORC situations.

Share Information and Evidence: Share theft event and offender information in real time through crime-linking platforms accessible to both public and private partners. When retailers share information via real-time information-sharing platforms like Auror, law enforcement is better able to track offenders, accomplices, and vehicles used in crimes. Providing law enforcement with statements and evidence is critical for linking crimes and building cases for prosecution.

Engage Law Enforcement to Take Cases to Prosecutors: Work with law enforcement to take cases to the City Attorney or County Prosecutor as appropriate. For cases that meet certain financial thresholds and cross jurisdictions, retailers can take cases directly to the Attorney General's Office.

Participate in Prosecution: Ensure retailer victims attend court hearings to assist in prosecution. Retailers or employees should also consider providing written victim impact statements to describe the emotional, physical, and financial impact suffered as a direct result of the instance of organized retail crime. The harm suffered by retailers, employees, and customers may not be immediately recognized by prosecutors and judges without the participation, attendance, and clear communication of impacts by retailers.

Advocate for Resources: Retailers should actively advocate for the necessary resources for law enforcement and prosecutors to address ORC. This includes partnering with industry groups to highlight the economic and community impacts of ORC and sharing data that illustrates the scale of the problem. Retailers can also engage directly with policymakers to emphasize the need for dedicated funding. By demonstrating the broader societal implications of ORC, retailers can help secure the support and resources necessary for effective enforcement and prosecution efforts.

Pursue Public-Private Partnership: Regular engagement with partners such as fellow retailers, community policing teams, and prosecutors is essential for establishing robust public-private partnerships to combat ORC. Collaborative efforts enable stakeholders to share intelligence, identify trends, and align strategies for prevention and enforcement. By fostering open communication and mutual trust, retailers can amplify their impact, support coordinated action, and contribute to a unified front against ORC. These partnerships not only enhance operational effectiveness but also build a network of accountability and shared responsibility.

Best Practices for Law Enforcement

Encourage Reporting: Building relationships with retailers and getting to know their managers and security staff are an important prerequisite for encouraging retailers to call and report ORC. Once relationships are established and trust is built, actively encourage retailers in your jurisdiction to report all ORC.

Prioritize 911 Calls: When practical, prioritize 911 calls associated with retail crime and avoid holding these calls or sending them to alternative call handling, such as online reporting.

Follow Up ASAP: If workload demands prevent a response, have a system in place to follow up with the retailer as soon as possible. This can be either a patrol officer or detective contacting the retailer within the next 24 hours.

Collaborate and Aggregate: Look for opportunities to collaborate on cases across jurisdictions and aggregate them for ORC prosecution. Law enforcement agencies have limited investigators to assign to these cases, so collaboration throughout counties and across jurisdictions is essential. Law enforcement agencies that are investigating ORC subjects should attempt to gather other instances of crimes from other cities (such as through crime-linking technology platforms), compile those details in their probable cause statements and investigative reports, and file charges on all the incidents, even if all events did not occur in the lead agencies jurisdiction. This is already done for identity theft and a similar approach can be applied here.

Law enforcement agencies should also contact the Washington State Attorney General's Office, which has a specialized unit to combat ORC, and Homeland Security Investigations as described in the "Organizing a Public-Private Partnership to Defeat Organized Retail Crime" for cross-jurisdictional cases.



Help Prosecutors Prioritize Cases: Work closely with the prosecuting attorney's office (PAO) to prioritize cases. Provide investigative recommendations on the cases/suspects, such as charging and asking for a higher level of jail time. Letters and memos are helpful and encouraged by both the PAO and some judges to indicate the importance of prosecuting ORC.

Maintain Contact: Maintain contact with the retailers during the follow-up to demonstrate that it is a real partnership. This is critical to encourage the continued reporting of additional retail crime.

Encourage Prioritization: Police executives can continue to work with elected and non-elected state and local officials to establish ORC as a priority.

Best Practices for Prosecutors

Convene Stakeholders: Host regular meetings with all ORC stakeholders, including retailers, prosecutors, and law enforcement to build relationships across organizations, facilitate the exchange of information about crimes and suspects/offenders, identify areas of common concern, and discuss process improvements.

The appropriate cadence may vary, but this likely entails roughly monthly meetings with front-line staff actively working on ORC investigations and prosecutions. Periodic (e.g., quarterly) meetings of front-line staff, as well as management and other leaders of stakeholder organizations, are helpful for higher level coordination and aggregation of information.

Share Evidence Checklists: Provide and ensure availability to law enforcement and retailers of checklists of evidence and information necessary to consider charges and subsequent prosecution of ORC offenders, such as the [King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office Checklist for Retail Crimes](#). Emphasize the need for the timely submission of evidence that clearly establishes sufficient proof of the:

- Offender's identity (via video/photos/witness identification);
- Items stolen or attempted to be stolen (via video/photos/witness testimony); and
- Value of the items stolen or attempted to be stolen (via inventory logs/receipts/internal retailer records/witness testimony).

Prioritize the Charging and Prosecution of High-Impact Offenders: High-impact offenders (HIO) are prolific offenders who have a disproportionate impact on ORC volumes. To prioritize management of HIO cases:

- Maintain an up-to-date HIO list.
- Develop guidelines for handling HIO cases.
- As resourcing allows, designate a retail theft Assistant District Attorney to handle HIO cases from beginning to end.

Involve and Communicate with Retailers: Establish ongoing communication with retail victims early in the case and ensure they are consulted and informed:

- Consult with retail victims on plea terms and prior to recommending or supporting release of an HIO from custody or deferring to court (e.g., Temporary Release to Rehab, Residential Based DOSA, Unsupervised Custody Electronic Monitoring, CCAP Enhanced Rehab).
- Communicate HIO release status to retail victims in a clear and timely manner.
- Immediately notify the retail victim(s) when a HIO fails to appear at or prematurely leaves a rehab facility.

Coordinate Prosecution: Consult frequently with prosecutors at the local, county, state and federal level to coordinate the prosecution of ORC offenders whose crimes are committed in multiple jurisdictions.

Request No Contact: Include in any pretrial release conditions the imposition of a no contact/no trespass order with the retailer victim.

Revoke Pretrial Release for Re-offenses: Seek the revocation of any pretrial release of any person who reoffends while on pretrial release.

Work with Judges on Education: Recommend a session on retail theft to be included on the program for the Annual State Judicial Conference. Seek other opportunities to ensure judges understand the magnitude of public safety and economic impacts of ORC.

Best Practices for Mayors

Share ORC Information with Elected Officials: Utilize groups like the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) and Sound Cities Association (SCA) to disseminate information updates and action items to all city mayors on the continuing impacts of ORC on local retailers (large and small), retail workers and community members. Message the lost city revenues statewide due to lost sales taxes, closed retailers, and shifts from brick-and-mortar to online retail (lost sales tax).

Ensure Law Enforcement Knows ORC is a Priority: Prioritization of addressing ORC by elected officials across the region is critical to ensuring ongoing attention and resourcing. This priority should be communicated clearly to local law enforcement.

Coordinate with Law Enforcement and the Local Business Community: Beyond relationship building and ongoing communication with local businesses, mayors and city officials should work with them to proactively deploy the variety of tools at their disposal to combat ORC, including:

- Consider local ordinances, such as requiring technological improvements by retailers to better manage shopping carts, which are often used to aid in ORC.
- Compel local shop owners to report via local ordinance.
- Allow for after-hours law enforcement trespasses without business notification if retailer requests.
- Coordinate on store blitzes with retailers to address hot spots.
- Discuss emerging trends in ORC and how to coordinate on evolving issues across stakeholders.
- Encourage or facilitate business-to-business communication.
- Communicate with district managers and government affairs staff in retail chains to support local staff efforts.

Emphasize Prioritization with Law Enforcement, Attorney General, and Other Electeds: Ensure law enforcement knows that this is a top public safety priority. As feasible, ensure local representation (either from the mayor's office or police department) on the Attorney General's Task Force to monitor data, assess improvements, and respond to challenges. Notify your state and federal elected representatives of the ongoing impacts on your community.

ORC Checklist

Retail Loss Prevention Checklist:

Theft is in progress or just occurred

- Call for a police response so they can attempt to make an arrest or identify the suspect(s).
- Prepare CCTV footage for responding Patrol Units. They can often send out pictures of the suspects to other LE Officers as they search the area. Officers will then collect video (Evidence.com link or per agency policy).
- Prepare a voided receipt for all stolen items. Only the price of the item is counted, not the tax.
- Prepare a detailed report as to what occurred. This should include all actions taken by the suspect(s) and employees. Include a detailed summary of your store's inventory process, as this is evidence as to how you know what was stolen.
- Respond to any follow up requests by any LE Officers.
- Share the CCTV video with ORC networks (RILA, AUROR) if policy allows.

Theft already occurred

- Consider how much time has passed since the theft before calling for patrol response or using an alternate reporting method.
- Identify the best way to report the theft to your local LE agency. Online reporting has a lot of limitations and very few agencies allow for retail theft to be reported online. Consider creating an email reporting system with your LE agency. You will be able to send all required information that way.
- Prepare CCTV footage for responding Patrol Units. They can often send out pictures of the suspects to other LE Officers as they search the area. Officers will then collect video (Evidence.com link or per agency policy).
- Prepare a voided receipt for all stolen items. Only the price of the item is counted, not the tax.
- Prepare a detailed report as to what occurred. This should include all actions taken by the suspect(s) and employees. Include a detailed summary of your store's inventory process, as this is evidence as to how you know what was stolen.
- Respond to any follow up requests by any LE Officers.
- Share the CCTV video with ORC networks (RILA, AUROR) if policy allows.

Patrol Checklist:

- Attempt to make an arrest and identify the suspect(s).
- Use email or text messaging to send out pictures from CCTV footage of suspect(s) to assisting LEO.
- Obtain voided receipt of all stolen items.
- Verify a method for CCTV security footage to be copied.
- Obtain witness statements from any witnesses (audio/visual is best). Often, several employees are witnesses but only the LPO sends in their written report.
- Check nearby bus stops, park and rides, transit centers, and the buses themselves.

- If a possible ID is made on the suspect who has not been detained, detail how the witness knows this possible ID. Often it is based on MO, or a vague description. That information is critical especially when the CCTV video quality is poor. This can have detrimental effects on an investigation if it is determined that the ID of a suspect is not solid.
- Think about your report being part of a larger case that gets media attention. Make sure to be detailed. Your report can be the difference between a misdemeanor or felony charge.

Investigator checklist for ORC case:

- Deconflict with any other agency you believe may be investigating the same suspect. You may find that another agency's case is stronger, and you can ask to have your case aggregated to theirs if needed.
- RCW 9A.56.350 Organized retail theft allows for a period of six months to aggregate theft cases. Each theft case you hope to aggregate must be proven on its own merits.
- How was the suspect identified? This is the most critical point as most of your evidence is CCTV footage. The best evidence of this is when another LEO identifies your suspects from a blind BOLO.
- Have that LEO provide a statement as to how they know the suspect (prior contact, frequency, and how recent). Ask for BWC footage of that contact as well.
- Obtain all relevant police reports, including other agency reports. Contact someone at the other agency who has authority over the case and have them write a small statement on their report showing that their agency will not be forwarding any charges for that case to their court's system. If not done quickly, these cases are often charged/filed, and it is more challenging to get the case pulled from that court system.
- Verify that CCTV footage for each theft incident is collected and summarized. Explain why you think each incident involves the same suspect(s).
- Detail how the items being stolen are used for Organized Retail Crime, as opposed to items needed for personal use.
- Detail actions taken by suspect (are they aggressive with employees/customers, do they damage property in order to steal, etc.).
- Attempt to identify possible fencing networks involving your suspect. Trafficking charges can be added along with ORC.
- Work with your crime analyst to look for any possible arrests of your suspect. Most ORC suspects will continue to steal until they are arrested.
- Consider providing affected retailers with sanitized BOLO of suspects. This often leads to retail employees identifying the suspects early and allows them to notify LE to make an arrest.
- Consider cell phone data/GPS warrants and detail any use of cell phones by suspect during thefts. This can help in identifying co-defendants and/or fences.
- Work with LPO to issue trespass warnings to suspects once they are arrested.
- Provide feedback to LPOs as they are a critical component to your investigation. This goes a long way when trying to build relationships with retailers.



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