

To the Committee:

I'm testifying today in opposition to SB 900, establishing a task force on organized retail theft. This bill is, in short, a hammer looking for a nail.

Although the data may look particularly grim, the truth of the matter is a mishmash of contorted numbers and scaremongering. According to several reports, including “Stores say shoplifting is a national crisis. The numbers don’t back it up,” from CNN reporter Nathaniel Meyersohn dated January 18, 2023.¹ In this report, it turns out that organized retail theft actually had less of an impact on business bottom line than years past. In fact, the same conclusions and same data manipulations were reported on in 2021, including the Los Angeles Times report “Retailers say thefts are at crisis level. The numbers say otherwise,” from December 15, 2021.²

The manipulation of public sentiment with fabricated narratives about financial outlays and worker fear might lead many to think that their business is experiencing an unprecedented spike in crime. This has led to narratives among some politicians to assert that Oregon has sunk into a wild west frontier mentality. The truth on the street, however, is that aggressive efforts to strong-arm the homeless has led to a change in police priorities, ranking the arrest of people for crimes of existence and poverty over solving and clearing organized retail theft cases.

Additionally, this bill is a clear shot across the bow, furthering a narrative that demonizes the state's major cities while ignoring that the existing circumstances that may see city government and their public safety department act as an anti-homeless shock force. The data do *not* provide proof of a need to push more resources into chasing down lesser crime like retail theft of any scale. Again, the legislature is considering expanding spending in order to appease certain sectors of Oregon's communities.

This committee should stamp this bill with a large “DO NOT PASS.”

AJ Earl, Portland

1 <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/18/business/retail-shoplifting-shrink-walgreens/index.html>

2 <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-12-15/organized-retail-theft-crime-rate>