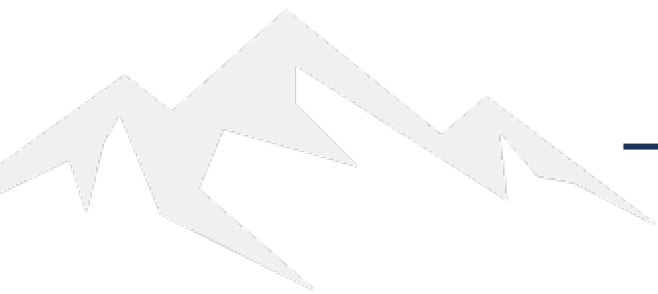




Smash, Grab, Repeat: Retail Theft in Colorado

November 2025

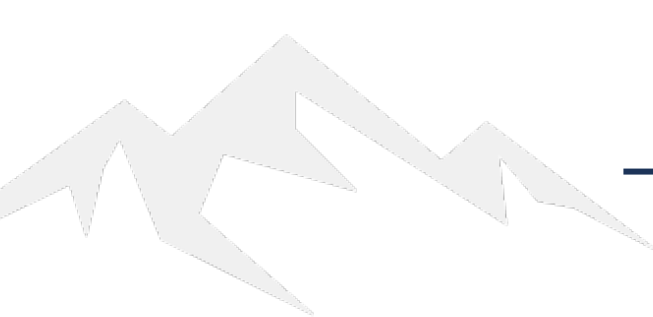


About the Author

Michael Tsogt



Michael Tsogt is a Policy Analyst at the Advance Colorado Institute. His areas of policy and research include education, budget/fiscal matters, and public safety. He has testified on a range of bills at the State Capitol, including a bill proposing education savings accounts for special needs and foster care kids in Colorado. During undergrad, Michael was elected as the Academic Senator for student government, covered sports and entertainment for the student newspaper, and participated in several political fellowships and opportunities, including at the Center for the Study of Government and the Individual, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Michael graduated from the University of Colorado with a degree in political science. He and his wife live in Colorado Springs.



Executive Summary

Coloradans are paying the price for retail theft and ongoing property crime in their communities. From shutting down stores, eliminating jobs, encouraging gang activity, and perpetuating crime cycles, the consequences of retail theft are affecting communities and families across the state.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Colorado lost \$139,810,700 in 2021 tax revenue due to retail theft.

Retail theft has also become increasingly violent. According to the National Retail Federation, nationwide data shows significant increases in concern about violence tied to organized retail crime.

The price communities pay for retail theft is consistently dismissed by state lawmakers. House Bills 25-1141 and 25-1142, which would have implemented mandatory midpoint sentences for repeat offenders and increased penalties for individuals refusing to leave a business when ordered to by law enforcement, were both killed in committee on party-line votes.

While Colorado's liberal legislators continue to ignore the issue, California citizens took it on in 2024, passing Proposition 36 in every single county. This measure cracked down on the skyrocketing rates of retail crime since the pandemic by implementing legal changes targeting organized retail crime, repeat offenders, and stricter punishments for drug-related offenses. New York, Virginia, and New Mexico have all also targeted retail theft in their own states.

At least one Colorado city has stepped up, despite the legislature's failure. Aurora's City Council passed mandatory minimum jail sentences for retail theft in 2022 and then strengthened them in 2024. Among the top ten largest cities in Colorado, the Common Sense Institute reported that Aurora saw the second sharpest decline in property crime rates per 100,000 people between 2021 and 2025.

This report documents the impact of retail theft in Colorado, giving citizens the opportunity to examine whether a different policy is needed to deal with serious property crimes.

The Costs of Retail Crime

In Colorado, the costs of retail crime are jobs lost, wages suppressed, and significant decreases in economic output. The state also loses out on taxes that could have been generated. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Colorado lost \$139,810,700 in 2021 tax revenue due to retail theft. (1)

In that same year, the total value of stolen goods in Colorado came out to \$642,164,867. The cost to businesses, which includes lost product costs, higher insurance, and unrealized wages, totaled \$1,631,518,400. (1)

THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME AND PRODUCT THEFT IN COLORADO

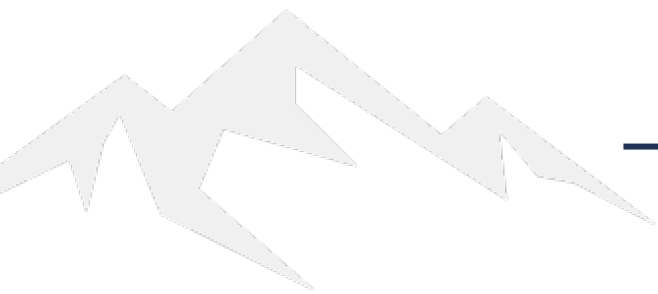
Economic Impact			
	Jobs	Wages	Output
Agriculture	-209	-\$7,197,000	-\$30,347,900
Business and Personal Services	-3,424	-\$215,670,800	-\$394,703,400
Mining	-70	-\$11,839,700	-\$36,134,700
Construction	-70	-\$4,603,200	-\$15,329,000
Finance Insurance and Real Estate	-1,236	-\$67,455,400	-\$409,744,200
Manufacturing General	-369	-\$24,123,300	-\$177,655,200
Retail	-1,047	-\$37,726,500	-\$98,980,800
Transportation & Communication	-629	-\$52,745,700	-\$219,812,000
Travel and Entertainment	-1,381	-\$44,901,300	-\$117,546,600
Wholesaler	-276	-\$26,791,700	-\$91,432,900
Government	-99	-\$9,320,400	-\$23,742,500
Other	-232	-\$9,922,100	-\$16,089,200
Total	-9,042	-\$512,297,100	-\$1,631,518,400

Taxes Generated: Business and Personal

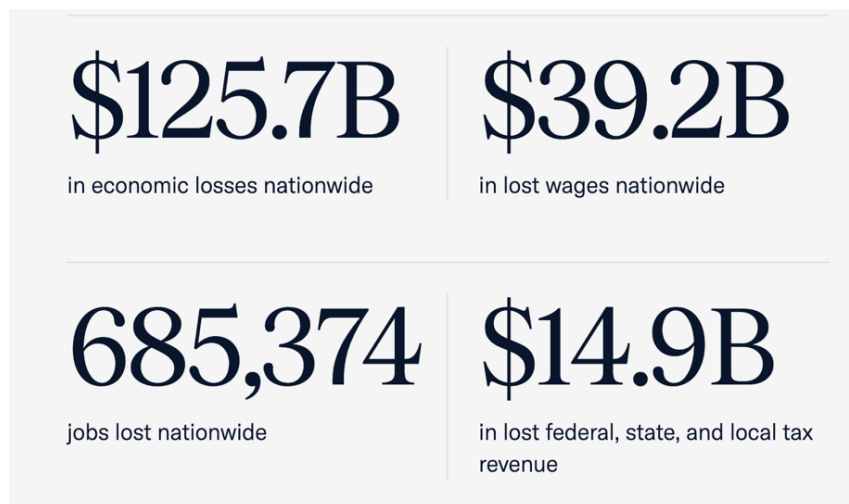
Federal	-\$81,591,200
State and Local	-\$58,219,500
Total Business and Personal Taxes	-\$139,810,700

(2)

In the National Retail Federation's 2024 Impact of Retail Theft & Violence Report, retail theft includes organized retail crime, shoplifting, smash-and-grabs, e-commerce theft and fraud, cargo and supply chain theft, return fraud, gift card fraud, internal employee theft, mob theft, burglary, and robbery. (3)

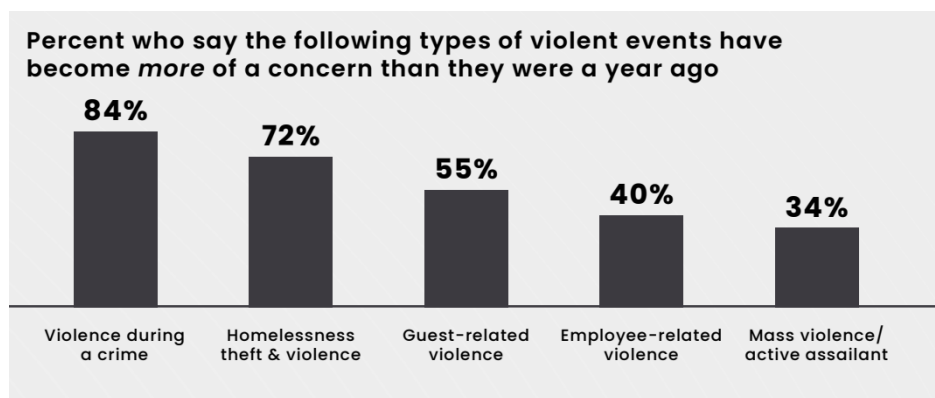


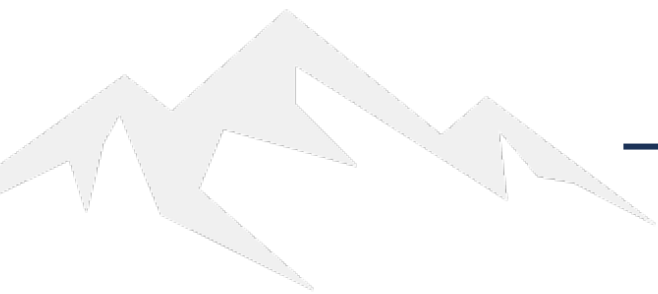
Across the United States, in 2021, retail theft caused the loss of 685,374 jobs and \$14.9 billion in tax revenue. The nation experienced a total of \$125.7 billion in economic losses. (1)



While the costs of retail crime in the United States are staggering, the costs are not solely financial. Retail crime continues to become increasingly more violent.

Retailers, according to the National Retail Federation, are significantly more concerned about violence during retail theft compared to the previous year, with 84% expressing this concern. (3)





According to the Common Sense Institute, violent crime and property crime rates in Colorado both increased in the first few years of the 2020s, costing the state “\$27 billion in economic losses in 2022 between the tangible and intangible effects of reported and unreported crime.” (4)

Understanding Retail Crime in Colorado

According to the Colorado Organized Retail Crime Alliance (COORCA), the definition of organized retail crime is:

“...the Theft/Fraud activity conducted with the intent to convert illegally obtained merchandise, cargo, cash, or cash equivalent into financial gain (no personal use), where/when the following elements are present: Theft/Fraud is conducted: over multiple occurrences; and/or in multiple stores; and/or in multiple jurisdictions; by two or more persons, or an individual acting in dual roles (booster & fence).” (5)

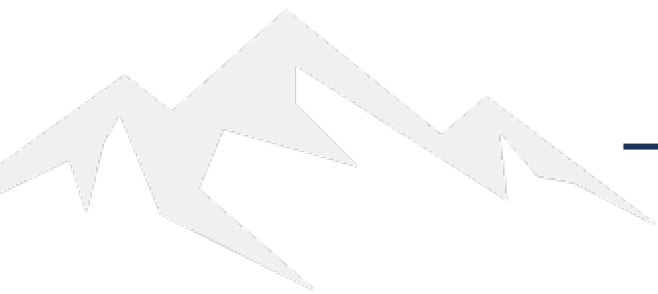
Retail crime is often perpetrated by groups, usually gangs, that involve “boosters,” those who are physically stealing the merchandise from these stores, and “fence operators,” the individuals who convert the stolen products into cash or drugs. (5)

According to COORCA, key aspects of organized retail crime are coordination and planning, large-scale theft, financial gain, connections to criminal enterprises, exploitation of supply chain vulnerabilities, and financial impacts on retailers and consumers. (6)

Organized Retail Crime vs. Shoplifting

- **Intent:** Shoplifting is typically for personal use, while ORC is for resale and profit.
- **Scale:** ORC involves large quantities of merchandise, while shoplifting is often a smaller amount.
- **Cooperation:** ORC involves groups, while shoplifting is usually done by a single individual.

Colorado’s retail crime, specifically shoplifting, occurs primarily in the Front Range.



This chart shows that Adams, El Paso, and Jefferson Counties outpace the state when it comes to the number of shoplifting incidents reported by the percentage of the total population of Colorado.

A key takeaway from the data is that retail theft is an issue almost everywhere in the state, with the “highest rates of shoplifting in Colorado occur[ring] in smaller, rural counties, while almost 89% of all incidents occur in ten counties, mostly in the Front Range.” (7)

National Attention on Retail Crime

Retail theft has recently received national attention, becoming one of the many critical public safety issues the country is facing.

The National Retail Foundation report revealed that criminals are targeting cargo and supply chain operations at transportation centers, trucks, and warehouses, as well as committing online and e-commerce-related theft, which includes returns and refund schemes, identity theft, and gift card fraud. (3)

Figure 3. Reported Shoplifting Incident Count by County in Colorado

2023	Total Shoplifting Crimes Reported	Percent of Total Shoplifting Crimes Reported	Percent of Total Population
Adams County	4,333	19.9%	9.1%
El Paso County	3,390	15.6%	12.6%
Jefferson County	2,757	12.7%	9.7%
Denver County	2,177	10.0%	12.0%
Larimer County	1,540	7.1%	6.7%
Douglas County	1,522	7.0%	6.5%
Weld County	1,359	6.2%	6.1%
Arapahoe County	1,044	4.8%	11.1%
Mesa County	602	2.8%	2.7%
Pueblo County	547	2.5%	2.9%
Top Ten Total	19,271	88.6%	79.2%
All Other Counties	2,484	11.4%	20.8%
Total	21,755	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

ORC goes beyond shoplifting and retail store-based theft

ORC activity is not limited to shoplifting or theft from retail locations. National media regularly showcases videos of large-scale thefts involving groups, smash-and-grab tactics and other highly visible acts of theft. However, ORC groups often engage in various thefts, frauds and crimes; some are less visible yet provide access to large quantities of goods, digital value and even personal identities. These other forms of ORC-related activity include:

- **Cargo and supply chain theft from transportation centers, containers, trucks, distribution centers and warehouses.**
- **Ecommerce thefts and frauds involving account takeovers, identity thefts and use of stolen credit, debit or gift cards to make fraudulent purchases to acquire goods.**
- **Fraudulent returns and refund schemes, loyalty fraud and false website personas or advertisements.**
- **Gift card frauds that include tampering, card swapping, phishing, vishing or phone scams for the purpose of acquiring digital stored value (i.e., gift card balance) to re-sell for proceeds or acquire goods.**

ORC groups engage in various criminal activity, seeking merchandise and goods that can be quickly sold online or by re-distributing goods back into the retail market.

Bipartisan Coalition Urges Congress to Take Action Against Rise in Organized Retail Crime

[Home](#) / [News & Resources](#) / [NAAG Policy Letters](#) / [Consumer Protection](#) / [Bipartisan Coalition Urges Congress to Take Action Against Rise in Organized Retail Crime](#)

Earlier this year, on February 24th, 2025, the National Association of Attorneys General penned a letter to the leaders of the 119th Congress. The letter outlined the consequences of retail crime across the country:

“...retail crime has reached a level never before seen in this country and, unfortunately, no community is immune from the economic impact and the violence that comes with it. Across the country, retailers, such as: Walgreens, Walmart and Target, have been forced to close stores due to a combination of sustained financial losses and their employees being physically assaulted by organized retail crime rings... Many communities - including underrepresented communities – are devastated by store closures leading to a lack of access to groceries, medication and the staples of everyday life.” (8)

The letter referred to two national efforts in 2023 that would have tackled retail crime: S.139 - Organized Retail Crime Center Authorization Act of 2023 and H.R.895 - Combating Organized Retail Crime Act of 2023. Neither was enacted. (9)(10)



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February 24, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson and
Minority Leader Jeffries:

As Attorneys General of Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois and South Carolina we are joined by the 34 Attorneys General of the undersigned states to encourage action during the 119th Congress to support our efforts to combat the nationwide organized retail crime epidemic. The 118th Congress saw increased attention to this pressing issue, and we applauded the efforts in both the House and Senate to address it through the introduction of H.R.895/S.140 – Combating Organized Retail Crime Act of 2023 and S. 139 – Organized Retail Crime Center Authorization Act of 2023. This legislation would provide the necessary resources at the state and federal level to bring the organizations and individuals behind this nationwide problem to justice.

The Consequences of Retail Crime in Colorado

Businesses Continue to Close

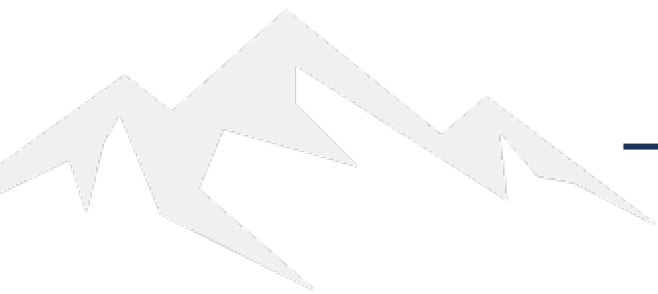
The City of Denver is losing a Safeway in the Five Points neighborhood due to its inability to protect the grocery store from theft.

@GenXJenDen, reported on X a statement from one of her readers detailing the closure:

“Heartbroken...My Safeway is closing at 757 E 20th. Employees told me, yeah the store is old, and undersized, but number 1 reason...The city flooded neighborhood with homeless apts and they can not stop the theft. It creates a food desert for the poor, but there also reason why it's closing. And odd, I went to Walgreens and Target yesterday, both stores Security throwing one person after the next out...all were trespassed at some point and kept coming back.” (11)



A Natural Grocers in Downtown Denver also closed recently. According to a statement by co-president Kemper Isely, “Despite our investment in security and loss prevention strategies over the years, these factors have continued to challenge our ability to operate our store safely and sustainably, and we have made the difficult decision to close our doors at this location.” The factors they cite are theft and safety issues. (12)



A family-owned Colorado Springs jewelry store is going out of business. The store was burglarized for the fourth time in recent years. This most recent break-in cost \$220,000. (13)

According to CBS Colorado, “Security cameras caught two people dressed in all black and wearing masks using a pickaxe to gain access to the store and a sledgehammer to smash glass display cases.” (13)



Two burglars broke into a Colorado Springs jewelry store at 3:24 a.m. March 23. It was the store's fourth burglary in recent years, and it is now going out of business.

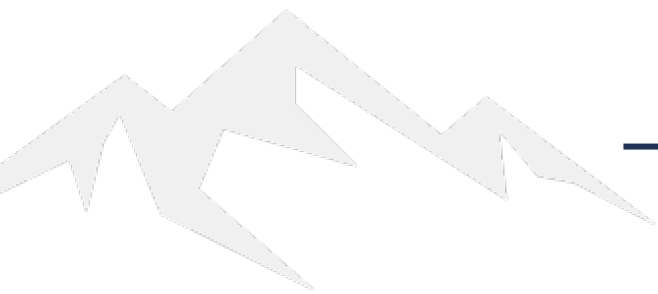
CBS

The daughter of the owners said this to CBS:

“This one was the most intense burglary, but it has happened four times total... We started off from a little kiosk in the Citadel Mall and it took us 24 years to work our way up to this store, and they took it apart in less than five minutes.” (13)

Gangs Coordinate Thefts: Tren de Aragua & the Bloods

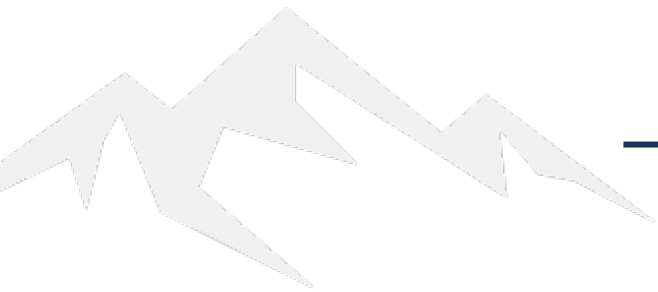
A 2024 jewelry heist in Denver made national news when it implicated a Tren de Aragua gang member. (14)



According to news reports, the store, Joyeria El Ruby, was robbed of \$2.5 million in fine jewelry. The crime was also extremely violent. Video footage showed female workers being assaulted and dragged across the room by their hair. (15)

“The brutal robbery caught on video shows several young men posing as clients suddenly turn on the all-female staff and clients. The robbers are seen pulling out guns, pushing open an office door and pistol whipping two women who fall onto on the floor. A young woman can be seen grabbing a baby and running out a back door during the chaos.” (14)





On April 28th, 2025, CBS reported that six leaders of the Bloods gang had been recently sentenced on organized crime charges:

“In all, members of the gang and another criminal group are blamed for five armed robberies, 40 burglaries and 12 attempted burglaries, according to the results of the multi-agency investigation. The two groups coordinated to steal more than three quarters of a million dollars in property and inventory.” (16)



Mark Michalek, the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Denver office, reported, “Thanks to the coordinated efforts of the FBI's Violent Criminal Enterprise Task Force and the Denver District Attorney's Office, 14 gang members and associates have been taken off the streets and held accountable for more than 326 felony offenses.” (16)

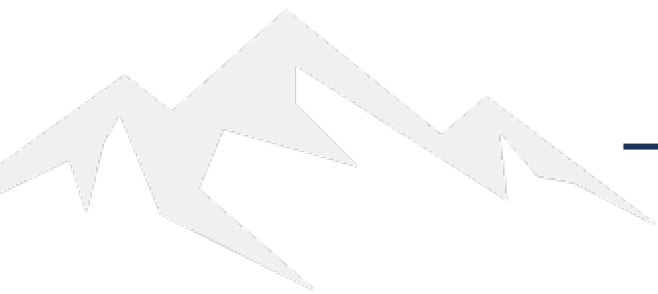
Shoplifting Rings and Vandalism Plague Stores

According to CBS Colorado, a recent shoplifting at a Victoria's Secret sparked an investigation that uncovered a shoplifting ring in Aurora – one that tied this incident to 98 other cases in the city. (17)

This one shoplifting ring alone caused close to \$100,000 in losses. (17)



Two suspected shoplifters are seen on Aurora police bodycam footage allegedly stealing merchandise from Victoria's Secret at the Town Center mall.
Aurora Police Department



In Pueblo, 3d's Cigars owner Doug Hatton remarked that he has had to protect his store and merchandise from both vandalism and retail theft. KOAA reported earlier this year that the store suffered broken windows and \$2,500 worth of product in one incident. (18)

Illicit Business Owners Engage in Theft

According to a 2023 KRDO news story, business owners Mischa and Jack Jargowsky were alleged to be part of a “multi-million dollar criminal organization involved in the sale of ‘large quantities of stolen property.’” The pair owned Top Dollar Pawn locations in Colorado Springs and Pueblo. (19)

Citadel and Chapel Hills Mall business owner under investigation for selling stolen retail items



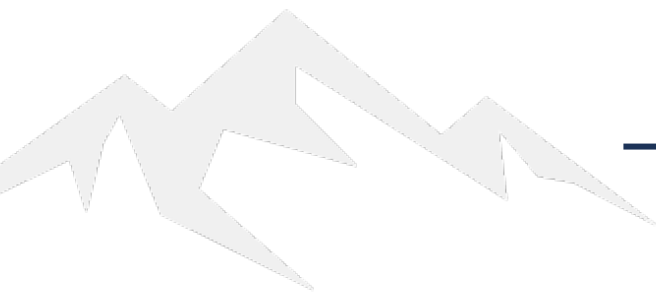
In Colorado Springs, owners of the “Heroes and Legends” stores in the Citadel Mall and the Chapel Hills Mall were under investigation for taking in stolen items and reselling them. Suspects have since been booked and charged with tax evasion. (20)

Understanding Colorado’s Path Forward

Recent Legislative Efforts Fall Short

House Bill 25-1141, an effort by Representative Brandi Bradley and Senator John Carson, targeted felony theft and gift card fraud. (21)

The bill was killed in the House Judiciary Committee on a party-line vote, but would have required “state court to sentence a person convicted of burglary, robbery, theft, or a related property crime from or of a store, who was convicted of any 2 of the specified property crimes or comparable municipal offenses from or of a store within the preceding 4 years, to at least the midpoint term for the current offense.” (21)



House Bill 25-1142, a bipartisan bill led by Representatives Jacque Phillips and Ryan Armagost, would have increased the ability to crack down on retail theft by increasing “criminal penalties for failing or refusing to leave a premises or property when requested by a peace officer.” However, this bill, too, was killed on a party-line vote in committee. (22)

Aurora Deals with Retail Theft

The City of Aurora responded to growing retail theft by implementing mandatory minimum jail sentences for theft in 2022 and doubling down in 2024. (23)

The Aurora law mandates at least three days in jail for retail theft of \$100 or more, 90 days in jail for a second offense, and 180 days in jail for a third offense. (24)

Aurora also cracked down on shoplifting via “dine and dash,” a phrase used to describe when a customer leaves a restaurant without paying for the meal, mandating three days in jail for a bill of \$15 or more. (24)

The Common Sense Institute recently published a report on property and violent crime in Colorado’s ten largest cities. The report found that between the years of 2021 and 2025, Aurora saw a decrease of 44% in property crime rates per 100,000 people, the second sharpest decline out of the ten cities. (4)

Liberal members of the Colorado General Assembly thought Aurora’s laws on theft were too harsh. Representatives Javier Mabrey and Elizabeth Velasco, and Senators Judy Amabile and Mike Weissman were the prime sponsors of House Bill 25-1147, a bill that would have prevented city courts from handing down harsher sentences than those allowed by state law. (25)

The bill would have undermined the ability of local governments to pass laws that directly affect their own communities, including Aurora’s policies on retail theft and shoplifting. In his veto letter, Governor Polis argued, “This bill would undermine numerous local ordinances that have been thoughtfully debated and adopted to address locality-specific crimes, including bike theft, assault, and domestic violence.” (26)

California's Proposition 36

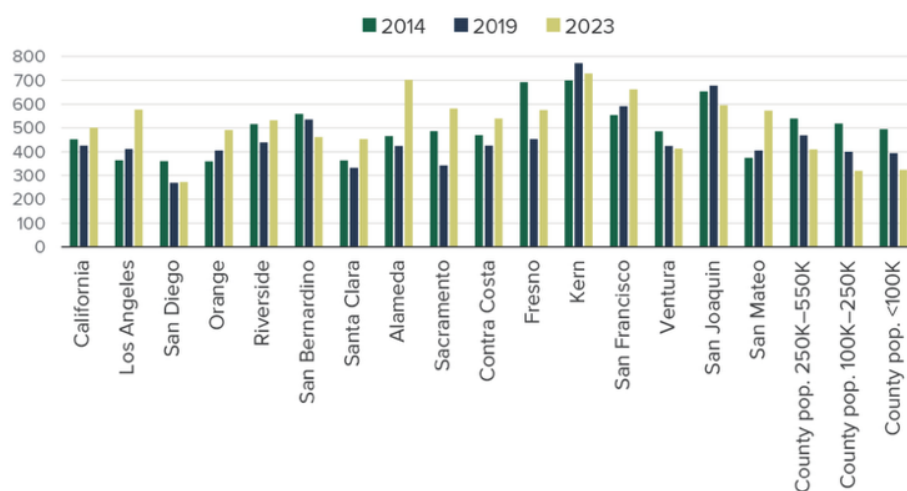
In 2024, California voters passed Proposition 36 by nearly 37 percentage points. (27)

The ballot initiative targeted retail theft and organized retail crime, but it also included stricter punishment for drug-related offenses, with a focus on fentanyl.

All 58 counties in California voted to pass the proposition. According to Mark Baldassare, the Survey Director of the Public Policy Institute of California, it is “not common for a statewide ballot measure to pass in every single county.” (28)

Most large counties have experienced post-pandemic increases in retail theft

Rates of reported annual retail theft incidents

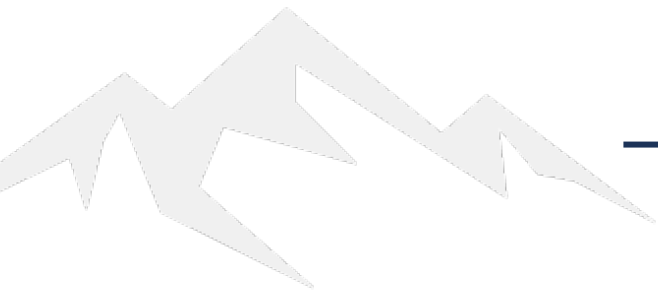


SOURCE: Author's calculation based on the California Department of Justice's Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2010–2023.

NOTES: Retail theft refers to the sum of reported shoplifting and commercial burglary incidents. Shoplifting is a category of larceny in the crime data, while commercial burglary is reported in the burglary category, and both are classified as property crimes. Retail theft refers to both crimes combined. Counties are shown in order of population (largest to smallest).

FROM: PPIC Blog, August 2024.

This unusual result can be attributed to the crimes experienced throughout the state that affected the public safety of every community. According to Cal Matters, shoplifting had skyrocketed during the pandemic, especially in Los Angeles, Alameda, San Mateo, and Sacramento counties. (29)



Full List of California Stores That Have Closed Due to Crime

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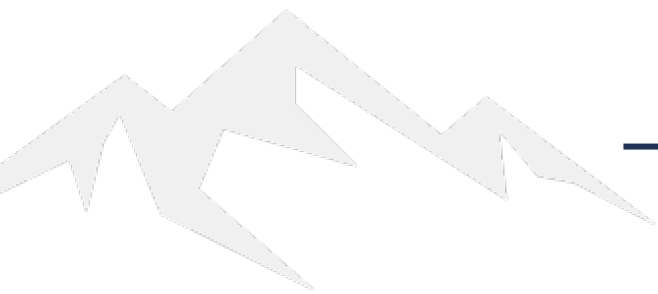
MAR 25, 2024 AT 06:57 AM EDT

UPDATED

MAR 27, 2024 AT 09:58 AM EDT

Newsweek announced a list of all the stores that closed in California between the summer of 2022 and the spring of 2024 due to crime:

- “7-Eleven: In July 2022, the company advised several of its California locations in the Los Angeles area to change their operating hours to increase customer safety amidst a rash of crime.
- Whole Foods: In May 2023, the supermarket chain announced the closure of its ‘flagship’ branch in downtown San Francisco, which it had opened only 13 months before in March 2022.
- Nordstrom: In the same month, Nordstrom announced the closure of both of its stores in downtown San Francisco, blaming the changing dynamics in the city market over the past few years.
- Target: In September 2023, Target announced the closure of several of its stores in California—including in Oakland and San Francisco—over concerns of a rise in retail theft.
- Starbucks and Subway: In November 2023, two Starbucks stores and a Subway restaurant located on Hegenberger Road and 98th Avenue closed their doors due to car break-ins targeting their customers.
- Denny's: In January 2024, a Denny's, which had been on Hegenberger Road in Oakland for 54 years, closed after being hit by a series of crimes.
- In-N-Out Burger: In the same month, In-N-Out Burger announced its only Oakland store was shutting its doors, citing threat to the safety of its employees and its customers.
- Macy's: In February 2024, Macy's announced the closure of one its most iconic locations, the store in Union Square, San Francisco, due to a rise in shoplifting.
- Taco Bell: In March 2024, the company announced it has suspended indoor dining in four of its restaurants in Oakland, and limited it in a fifth store to customers making contactless payments.” (30)



The Public Policy Institute of California reported: “Shoplifting then jumped 29% in 2022 and surged another 39% in 2023; as a result, it was 28% higher—with about 24,000 more reported incidents—than in 2019, and at its highest observed level since 2000.” (31)

Citizens clearly understood that reforming state law was necessary to curb retail crime in California. Because they were able to see a connection to crime and consequences in their own lives and communities, voters overwhelmingly voted to pass Proposition 36, a measure that will, “Increase penalties for smash-and-grab crimes, create tougher penalties and better accountability for repeat retail theft offenders, and allow stolen property values from multiple thefts to be combined, countering tactics by career thieves who steal repeatedly to avoid harsher penalties.” (32)

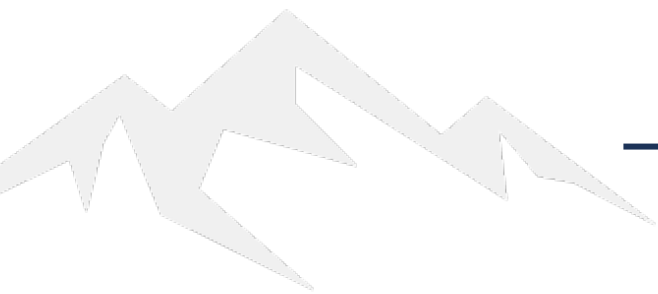
Statewide data on Proposition 36’s effects of deterring retail crime by increasing penalties, specifically for repeat offenders, isn’t available yet. However, one county has reported early numbers.

On August 20th, 2025, San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan released “promising data related to prosecutions and court-mandated treatment under new laws created by the passage of Proposition 36,” showing that “a total of 1,778 cases have been charged with one of the two key portions of Prop 36: repeat theft offenders charged under Penal Code section 666.1 and repeat hard drug offenders charged under Health and Safety Code section 11395.” (33)

The office also mentioned that local businesses are reporting anecdotally that “stricter penalties are deterring theft and providing a sense of security for businesses previously targeted by repeat offenders.” (33)

More States Act on Retail Crime – With Results

In 2023, Virginia passed its own law on organized retail theft, making it a Class 3 felony with a sentence of up to 20 years “for anyone to conspire or act in concert with one or more people to steal retail merchandise with a value exceeding \$5,000 in a 90-day period, with the intent to sell the stolen goods for profit.” (34) In 2025, Virginia is on pace for a 35% decrease from the prior year in shoplifting reports filed. (35)



New York passed several measures targeting retail theft to tackle the post-pandemic shoplifting surge. These measures included implementing a statewide task force, laws targeting repeat shoplifters, and upgrading the assault of a retail worker to a felony. (36)

Governor Kathy Hochul’s office reported in August 2025 that they are seeing “retail theft declining more than 12 percent year over year — a decrease of nearly 5,000 instances — in New York City and 5 percent across the rest of the state.” (37)

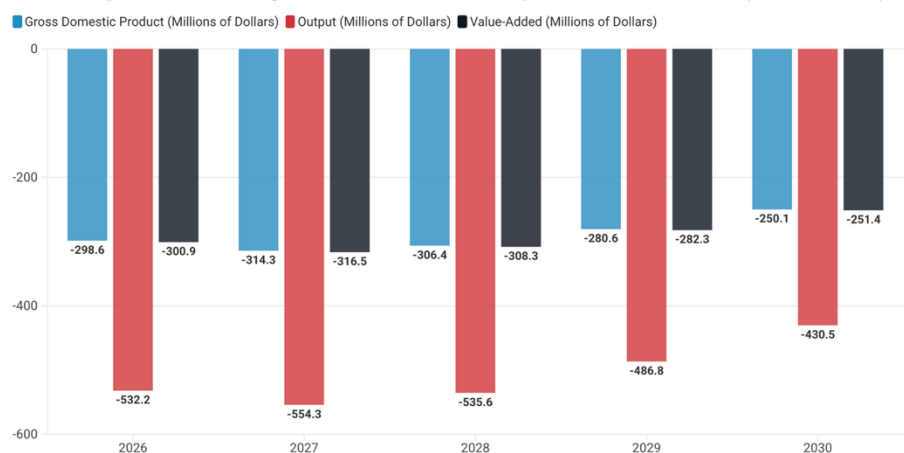
New Mexico also passed a law targeting organized retail crime in 2023, allowing “prosecutors to add up the value of stolen items regardless of where it was stolen,” making it easier to charge repeat offenders with a felony. (38)

Earlier this year, Jeffery Barnard, Commander of the Investigative Service Division for the Albuquerque Police Department, reported that, “Year to date stats starting in November, we were down in shoplifting for the year overall.” (38)

Projected Losses to Colorado’s GDP

A recent report by the Common Sense Institute projected that Colorado’s Gross Domestic Product will decline by \$298.6 million in 2026, \$314.3 million in 2027, \$306.4 million in 2028, \$280.6 million in 2029, and \$250.1 million in 2030. (39)

Counting the Cost: Projected Retail Theft Impacts for Colorado (2026-2030)



Source: CSI Modeling and Analytics



CSI’s modeling is based on an estimated \$1.3 billion loss in retail sales value, which is “the approximate value of goods stolen from Colorado retailers in 2022.” (39)

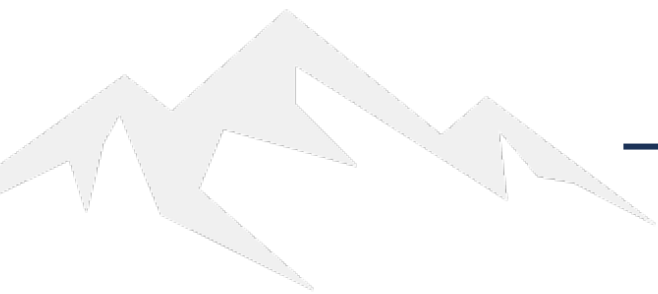


Conclusion

Retail theft in Colorado is out of control, with lax laws that lag behind other states experiencing similar issues. Implementing mandatory minimum jail sentences for retail theft, smash and grab crimes, and gang activity in stores has the potential to reduce and deter retail crime in Colorado.

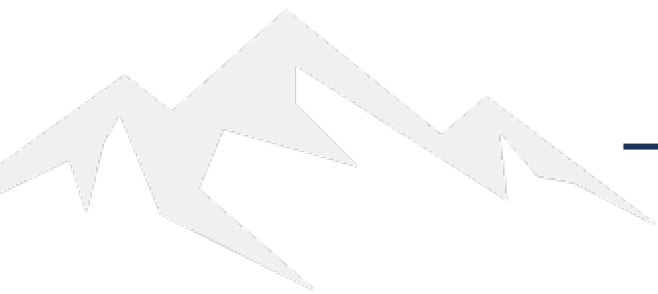
Retail crime affects everyone: from the consumer and the business owner to the entire community, threatening safety, stability, economic viability, and access to essential resources like food and medicine. Unchecked theft results in lost jobs, suppressed wages, and closed businesses – which can devastate the neediest areas of a state.

The City of Aurora, the State of California, and other states like Virginia, New York, and New Mexico have set a path forward to tackle retail crime in their communities, and Colorado would be wise to follow.

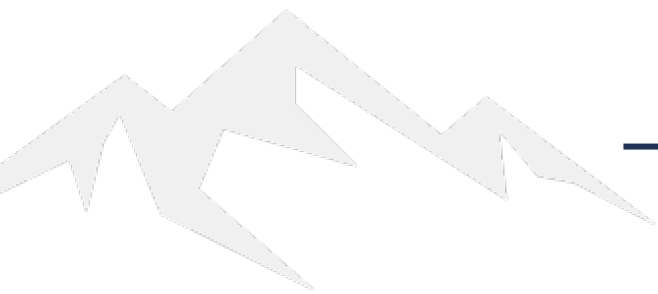


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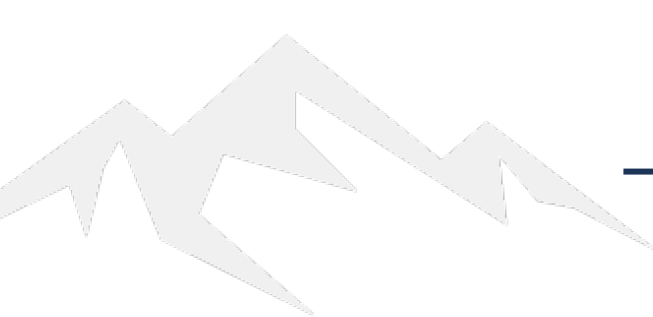
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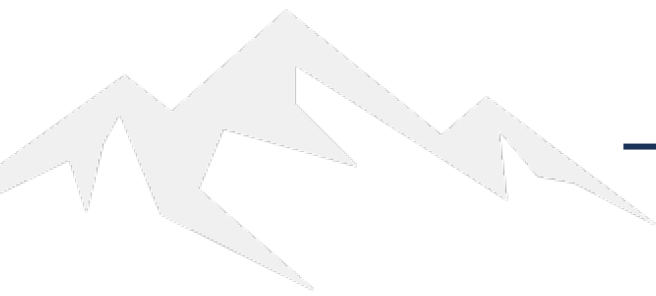


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