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V.I. Attorney General Joins National Coalition Urging Congress to Combat Organized Retail Crime

AG Gordon Rhea joins a 38-state coalition urging Congress to reintroduce legislation to combat organized retail crime, which has caused \$121 billion in losses. The effort seeks stronger enforcement, increased penalties, and federal resources to curb theft

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Amid a nationwide surge in organized retail crime, Attorney General Gordon C. Rhea of the U.S. Virgin Islands has joined 38 attorneys general from across the country in urging Congress to take decisive action against the growing threat. The bipartisan coalition has formally requested that the 119th Congress reintroduce critical legislation to strengthen enforcement, increase penalties, and allocate resources to combat retail theft rings that are costing businesses billions.

Organized retail crime has led to more than \$121 billion in financial losses across the United States, with 76% of retail asset protection managers reporting incidents of employee assaults linked to these criminal networks. Cargo theft is another major factor, disrupting supply chains and contributing to rising consumer prices for essential goods, including baby formula and clothing.

According to Attorney General Rhea, the Virgin Islands is not immune to these crimes, which not only harm businesses but also jeopardize the safety of local communities. “In light of the alarming rise in organized retail crime across our nation, I am proud to join a bipartisan coalition of 38 states and territories in urging Congress to take decisive action. This growing issue not only threatens the livelihoods of retailers but also impacts local communities and economies, including the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is imperative that we work together to implement effective measures that protect businesses and ensure the safety of consumers,” he stated.

During the 118th Congress, lawmakers introduced several bills aimed at addressing the issue, including:

- H.R. 895/S. 140 – Combating Organized Retail Crime Act of 2023
- S. 139 – Organized Retail Crime Center Authorization Act of 2023

These measures proposed the establishment of an Organized Retail Crime Coordination Center within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to enhance collaboration between state and federal law enforcement agencies. The new coalition is now pushing for these bills to be reintroduced in the 119th Congress with additional provisions, including increased federal penalties for supply chain thefts to deter organized theft of goods in transit.

Many attorneys general have already taken steps to combat organized retail crime by forming task forces and prosecution units dedicated to addressing this issue. However, resources remain limited, and state officials stress the importance of federal assistance to effectively tackle cross-border criminal operations.

The letter sent to Congress highlights the need for better coordination with federal agencies, emphasizing that a nationwide response is essential. The proposed legislation would provide funding to state and local law enforcement for investigations, prosecutions, and joint task force operations aimed at dismantling these criminal networks.

The ripple effects of organized retail crime extend beyond financial losses for retailers. The closure of stores due to sustained theft has significantly affected underrepresented communities, leaving them with fewer options for groceries, medication, and other essential goods. As Attorney General Rhea and his counterparts have pointed out, tackling organized retail crime is not just about protecting businesses—it is about ensuring consumer access to basic necessities and maintaining economic stability.

The coalition's message to Congress is clear: the time for action is now. They urge lawmakers to maintain their focus on addressing this issue and to allocate resources that will strengthen enforcement efforts at both the state and federal levels.

The initiative is led by attorneys general from Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, and South Carolina, with support from 34 other states and territories, including the U.S. Virgin Islands.

