

**May 13, 2022**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL APPLAUDS SIGNING OF LEGISLATION TO COMBAT THE RISE IN ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME**

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today applauded Gov. J.B. Pritzker for signing legislation Raoul initiated to combat the rise in organized retail crime and disrupt the criminal enterprises that engage in and profit from organized retail theft.

Raoul, in partnership with the Illinois Retail Merchants Association (IRMA), initiated House Bill 1091 to address organized retail crime throughout the state of Illinois. The new law closes gaps in current Illinois law by defining the offense of organized retail crime, which will provide law enforcement with more tools to investigate and prosecute the actors who orchestrate these criminal activities.

"Serious criminal activities, including gunrunning and drug trafficking, have been funded using proceeds from the sales of merchandise stolen through organized retail crimes. This is not just a criminal problem – this hurts consumers as well. That is why we need online marketplaces to do their part. Online marketplaces must use their intellectual resources to make sure criminals are not selling stolen products on their sites, which will help us protect consumers," Raoul said. "This law strengthens the authority of my office and other law enforcement agencies to disrupt criminal enterprises that are directly responsible for the rise in organized retail crime. I appreciate Gov. Pritzker's signing of this important law, as well as the leadership of Sen. Glowiak Hilton and Rep. Kam Buckner in guiding this bipartisan proposal through the Illinois General Assembly."

"This new law represents another important step to fight crime and advance public safety in Illinois," Governor Pritzker said. "This is how we protect store workers and customers, prevent militarized storefronts and empty commercial corridors, and across the board, make communities safer for all who call them home. And I look forward to furthering our work to shape a public safety system that works for all of us, including ensuring the victim rights advanced today are carried throughout our justice system."

"Organized retail crimes across the state have disturbed residents, wreaked havoc on businesses and stunted growth within local economies," Glowiak Hilton said. "By advancing the Organized Retail Crime Act, Illinois is enacting one of the most comprehensive crime-curbing efforts in the nation."

"One of my top priorities this session has been to address the organized retail theft that has been plaguing both downtown Chicago and the small businesses across our neighborhoods," said Buckner. "Between inflation and the lingering effects of the pandemic, local businesses are already facing major obstacles. By creating a specific offense for this crime, we can protect the local businesses and residents who are being targeted by criminal enterprises, which will then protect the safety and economic wellbeing of communities across Chicago and the state."

"Organized retail crime is not a victimless crime. It threatens the safety of employees and customers, robs businesses of tax dollars and puts communities at risk of further crime including illegal firearm purchases, human trafficking and even terrorism. We thank Governor Pritzker for signing this important measure into law, creating additional avenues to combat these complex crimes and provide for safer communities," Rob Karr, president & CEO, IRMA said. "I want to thank Attorney General Raoul for his partnership in combatting the rising issue of organized retail crime, as well as every lawmaker who supported and voted in favor of this measure that will help protect retailers, employees and customers across the state."

The new law creates and specifically defines organized retail crime in Illinois law. Organized retail crime and retail fraud are often mistakenly viewed as being isolated incidents; however, organized crime rings that commit a series of serious crimes are often behind these acts. Organized criminal enterprises connected to the drug trade, human trafficking and other criminal activities target big box stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, auto dealerships and other retailers to carry out sophisticated theft operations, and these operations cross county and state borders. Enterprises use boosters and mules to coordinate thefts of large amounts of merchandise, which is then resold below market value using online marketplaces in order to fund the enterprise's other illegal activities.

The new law puts in place stronger oversight of these online marketplaces to curb actors who use these exploit these legitimate platforms to illegally sell stolen goods. It also creates a statewide intelligence platform to help retailers and law enforcement agencies better coordinate their enforcement efforts. Additionally, the new law requires online marketplaces to verify the identity of high-volume sellers. This will help police outlets used to monetize stolen merchandise.

The law also aims to reduce a criminal's ability to avoid prosecution for organized retail crime. It would allow any state's attorney where any element of organized retail crime takes place to prosecute the whole crime. Under the law, people participating in smash and grab robberies, as well as looting of supply chain vehicles such as trains and cargo trucks, could also be prosecuted for organized retail crime. The new law would also provide the Attorney General's office authority to utilize the statewide grand jury to prosecute organized retail crime. In addition, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million to the Attorney General's office to award grants to state's attorney's offices and law enforcement agencies that investigate and prosecute organized retail crime.

The new law builds on the work of Attorney General Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force, the first statewide, public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois. The task force is designed to foster cooperation among retailers, online marketplaces, law enforcement agencies and state's attorneys dedicated to targeting organized retail crime enterprises. The task force allows Raoul's office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers and partner across jurisdictions with law enforcement agencies to investigate organized retail crimes and trace thefts to the source. For example, the Organized Retail Crime Task Force, with support from Chicago law enforcement recovered more than \$1 million worth of stolen goods from several Chicago-area storage units during December 2021. Raoul's goal in establishing the task force is to continue to improve communication among public and private entities and utilize a multifaceted approach to combatting organized retail theft and related criminal activity.