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To: Assembly Public Safety and Preparedness Committee
From: Eric Blomgren, Executive Director
New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, Automotive, Association

Re: Support A-4755 “Concerns retail theft, establishes retail theft unit, and appropriates \$1 million.”

NJGCA represents a large portion of the state’s more than 2,500 convenience stores, most of whom are small businesses, and on their behalf that we support this bill.

The threat of organized retail crime has been a growing fear for our members. They have seen online videos of smash and grabs and worry that they and their staff may be victimized sooner rather than later. What is important to understand about this problem and about this bill specifically, is that what we are dealing with is a form of organized crime. This is not about—and would not apply to—a teenager pocketing a candy bar. This is about a professional criminal who pays people to go out and ransack store shelves, carrying out everything they can carry, and bringing it back for a direct payment. Then the organizer proceeds to sell the stolen items wherever they can, be it at physical flea markets or through online marketplaces at prices well below retail cost—but at almost a pure profit for the ringleader.

Because these are organized and planned criminal operations, they are more likely to spread to other states and towns when they sense vulnerability. As other states like New York consider stiffer penalties and greater enforcement, our state’s businesses may become a bigger and more tempting target in the near future. Organized Retail Crime (ORC) groups are interested in following the path of least resistance, and without this legislation that path may lead them to New Jersey.

Once the theft is over, the retailer is left bearing the cost of replacing the stolen merchandise. Unfortunately, not all small businesses have full commercial insurance to cover the costs of the stolen merchandise, and those that do will still have deductibles and will likely see higher insurance premiums in the future. Also, the person downstream who unknowingly buys the stolen merchandise is now not buying that item at a legitimate retailer, so overall sales decline.

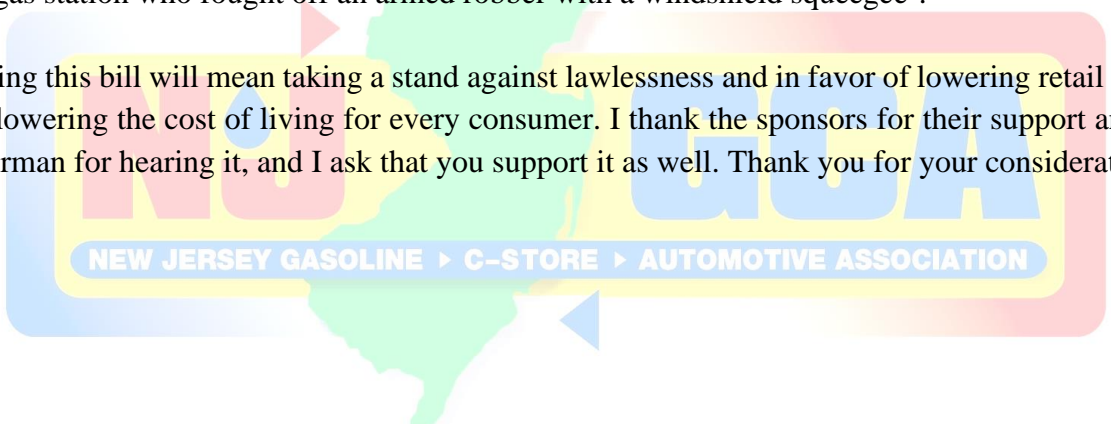
There is also a large cost in time to the business owner that comes from recovering from a smash and grab. Time spent talking to police, talking to the insurance company, inventorying what was stolen, getting it reordered and restocked, potentially being closed for some amount of time if there

was damage to shelves or the doors and windows. All of that is time not spent managing the day-to-day of the business, growing the business, or spending time with their family.

Ultimately there is only one place to recoup higher operating costs—higher retail prices for the vast majority of law-abiding consumers, further increasing our state’s already far too high cost of living.

I want to particularly applaud the section of the bill which adds retail workers to the list of protected classes for whom assault is automatically upgraded to aggravated assault. Retail work is hard enough, and employers know that it would be hard enough to recruit people even without the risk of being robbed. These workers are just trying to provide for themselves and their families, they should never be threatened or assaulted just for doing their job. Stores always have policies stating that employees should not resist and risk violence breaking out, but human nature for some takes over and they sometimes find themselves in a fight, particularly if the employee is the owner or a family member of the owner. For example, just a few months ago there was video of an employee at a gas station who fought off an armed robber with a windshield squeegee¹.

Passing this bill will mean taking a stand against lawlessness and in favor of lowering retail prices and lowering the cost of living for every consumer. I thank the sponsors for their support and the Chairman for hearing it, and I ask that you support it as well. Thank you for your consideration.



¹ <https://newjersey.news12.com/clifton-gas-station-attendant-uses-squeegee-to-fend-off-armed-robber>