

BUSINESS

HomeGoods, Marshalls and other NJ retailers equip staff with bodycams to reduce theft

3-minute read



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If you go into a HomeGoods or HomeSense in New Jersey, don't be surprised to see store workers wearing something more typically associated with a police officer: body cameras.

The owner of the retail stores said that body cameras will be worn to deter thieves.

A spokesperson at TJX — which owns HomeGoods, HomeSense, Marshalls, Sierra and TJ Maxx — said in a statement to NorthJersey.com affiliate USA TODAY that the body cameras have been used in various stores over the past year.

Not every store employee will have a body camera, the spokesperson said, but they will be worn by loss prevention associates trained to use them.

The retail stores hope that the body cameras will add another level of security, reduce crime and prevent escalated incidents from occurring.

“Adding cameras is understandable inasmuch as it helps protect staff against abuse and allows them to record any unlawful behavior that they come across,” said Neil Saunders, a retail analyst and managing director of GlobalData.

“Sadly, theft and other criminality has been on the rise in retail, so this is a response to that,” Saunders said.

Target uses 'True Scan' to fight retail theft

The push for more security comes as department stores like Target started adding measures to stop retail theft. For example, the department store's new “True Scan” will detect if barcodes aren't scanned while a customer is in a self-checkout lane.

Target said it was closing nine stores in New York City, the San Francisco Bay area, Portland and Seattle, explicitly citing retail theft as the driving factor for the closures.

But the National Retail Federation, a trade group, previously pulled back a statistic it promoted saying that organized retail crime accounted for nearly half of retail inventory loss — the number was in fact much smaller.

That came after a November investigation by trade publication Retail Dive, which found discrepancies in the NRF's data.

Will it work?

“I think the jury's still out on this,” said Brian Higgins, a former chief of the Bergen County police.

As with police officers, it will help in the case of any store employee accused of misconduct, said Higgins, an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan.

“It's a combination of protecting their employees — making sure their employees actually are appropriate,” Higgins said. But the policy would also be another option for employers whose rules do not allow security to go after or physically touch someone suspected of shoplifting, said Higgins.

According to the National Retail Federation, 11% of retailers surveyed said they were piloting or testing the use of body cameras in their stores.

'Knee-jerk reaction'

Jason Williams, associate professor of justice studies at Montclair State University, decried the move as “a desperate, knee-jerk reaction.”

“Putting their retail workers on the front lines of fighting retail theft opens up a pandora's

box of risks and liability,” he said in an email.

“I also wonder what impact this may have on racial minorities who already face increased surveillance in retail shopping spaces based on negative racial-ethnic stereotypes,” he said.

This article contains information from USA TODAY.

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