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July 6, 2026

RE: Retail theft in Washington County

Dear Washington County retail businesses:

We are writing to ask for your assistance.

Addressing retail theft is a priority in Washington County. As part of our efforts, we created a countywide taskforce and obtained approximately \$3 million in grant funds. We have a reputation as a community where criminal activity, including retail theft, is not tolerated.

The impact of retail theft is significant. It harms businesses, puts employees at risk, and places customers and the public in harm's way. As we have seen in recent years, communities and leaders who minimize or ignore retail theft do so at the expense of safety, livability, and economic vitality.

Despite best efforts, retail theft remains a challenge. In Washington County, a concerning number of criminals come into our community to steal. From 2023 to 2025, **over 60% of theft cases referred to the DA for prosecution involved defendants who were not Washington County residents.**¹ During that same period, approximately **21% of referred felony cases were committed by defendants from Multnomah County.** Put simply, Washington County and its vibrant economy are a target for criminals.

While these numbers are alarming, individual stories are equally sobering. In August 2024, a man carrying a stolen firearm and riding a stolen motorcycle targeted a Nordstrom Rack to steal a pair of shoes. As he was arrested leaving the store, he fired his gun and fought with police officers, prompting a return of fire that led to his death. A few weeks ago in June 2026, a man assaulted police officers with a knife while he was being arrested for theft from a Winco. The lesson from stories like these is that criminals who commit misdemeanor level thefts often pose felony level risks.

¹ This figure includes homeless defendants, who accounted for approximately 30% of theft case referrals.

New Presumptive Arrest and Booking Policy

In recognition of the seriousness of this issue, Washington County law enforcement agencies are implementing a new *presumptive arrest and booking policy* for retail theft. For all misdemeanor and felony retail thefts, police officers will presumptively arrest and book in jail when legally justified, rather than issue a criminal citation.¹ Immediately addressing retail theft through an arrest promotes safety and helps deter crime.

Request for Assistance

While Washington County law enforcement works to combat retail theft, your partnership and assistance is important in two ways:

(1) Report all theft (misdemeanor and felony)

Please report all theft (misdemeanor and felony) without delay and cooperate with the law enforcement investigation. You may report theft by calling 911 or the non-emergency dispatch at 503-629-0111. Washington County law enforcement will respond and investigate as appropriate.

We are aware that some retailers do not report thefts below certain dollar thresholds. Please reconsider those policies. Failing to report theft puts your employees, your customers, your fellow retailers, and your community at risk.

(2) Review your vehicle removal/tow policy

Many retailers with private parking have policies regarding the towing removal of non-customer vehicles. If you have such a policy, your use of that policy may be helpful in the effort to deter criminals from driving into our community to steal.² If you do not have such a policy, your consideration of implementing a policy would be helpful.

Criminals, especially those who commit organized retail theft, communicate with each other. They know which stores call the police, which police agencies respond, and which DAs prosecute.

We are doing all we can to address retail crime and appreciate your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

The Law Enforcement Council of Washington County

²Under this presumptive policy, officers continue to retain the ability to use their independent judgment and discretion regarding whether to make an arrest, issue a citation, or take other action. After an arrest is made, a variety of other factors (e.g. jail capacity, judicial orders, sheriff policies, etc.) affect whether the arrested individual remains in jail custody.

³Please note that we cannot offer legal advice regarding whether and when towing a vehicle is justified under Oregon law. The decision whether to tow a vehicle parked on private property is entirely yours.