

**Opening Statement to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and
Constitutional Affairs**

**Bill C-14, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and
the National Defence Act (bail and sentencing)***

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to represent the Retail Council of Canada—the voice of retail in this country.

We represent over 54,000 storefronts of all sizes, from national chains to independent merchants. As an industry, we are the largest private-sector employer in Canada, providing jobs to more than 2.3 million people—that is 1 in 8 working Canadians. We also contribute over \$80 billion annually to Canada's GDP—so simply put, when retail is healthy, the Canadian economy is healthy.

But right now, our sector is facing a crisis that is unique in the Canadian landscape. If you ask any retailer in this country what their number one issue is, they won't say inflation or supply chains. Which are pretty big problems! They will tell you it is retail crime. This is no longer just "the cost of doing business." It is a full-blown national emergency.

The data from Statistics Canada back this up. Last year, while the overall Crime Severity Index fell by 4%, and property crimes dropped generally, police-reported shoplifting rose by 14%. It has increased now for four consecutive years. Retail is the glaring statistical exception in Canada's crime landscape. / *Les données de Statistique Canada confirment cette réalité. L'an dernier, alors que l'Indice de gravité de la criminalité chutait de 4 % et que les crimes contre les biens diminuaient de manière générale, la police rapportait que les incidents de vol à l'étalage avaient fait un bond de 14 %. Ce type de méfait a augmenté pendant quatre années consécutives. L'industrie du détail est donc une exception statistique dans le paysage de la criminalité au pays !*

Our industry estimates that the total impact of this crime is nearing \$9 billion annually. But the real story isn't just the value of the goods stolen. It is the diversion of capital.

Every dollar a retailer is forced to spend on security guards, or a locking case, is a dollar not being spent on productivity improvements. Those types of investment that would benefit the economy, and, Canadians alike. We are essentially forcing our businesses to invest in defense rather than growth. This results in a massive hidden tax on every Canadian consumer.

How big is that \$9 billion hit to consumers from retail crime? It works out to \$580 per household, and more still when the rising cost of additional security measures is added. The perpetrators aren't Robin Hoods. They are hurting their neighbours economically, as well as store owners, with increasing violence, brazenness and gang activity.

I should also mention that as this crisis grows, we have seen side-discussions emerge—such as the recent push in Ontario to arm private security guards. I want to be clear: this is unwelcome by retailers. We do not want to arm the private sector; we want the professional justice system to have the tools to do its job. Bill C-14 is exactly where the focus should remain—providing actual law enforcement and the justice system with the tools to keep our stores and communities safe.

We are here today because we want to move from describing the problem to implementing the solutions. Bill C-14, in our view, is a common-sense first step.

First, C-14 addresses the **"Revolving Door."** The expanded reverse-onus provisions for repeat violent offenders directly target the prolific criminals responsible for a massive percentage of these incidents. When a retailer sees the same face back in their store stealing 48 hours after an arrest, it demoralizes the staff and undermines public confidence. This bill gives the courts the tools to stop that cycle.

Second, it targets the **Business of Crime.** By making "organized retail theft" an explicit aggravating factor in sentencing, this legislation finally acknowledges that we aren't dealing with petty shoplifting. We are dealing with sophisticated criminal networks that sell stolen property for profit. C-14 ensures the punishment actually fits the organized nature of the offense.

Third, it prioritizes **Worker Safety.** With a surge in retail violence since the pandemic, our 2.3 million workers need to know the law is on their side. The focus on deterrence

for repeat offenders sends a clear message: the safety of the person behind the counter is a national priority.

Looking beyond this bill, we see C-14 as the foundation for a broader national strategy. To truly turn the tide, we will eventually need to complement this legislation with a National Reporting Portal to track organized rings across provincial lines, and modernize information sharing between retailers and police. Of course, ensuring our justice system and police forces are adequately funded to tackle these big challenges is vital.

Bill C-14 is the catalyst we've been waiting for. It is the solution retailers—and the communities they serve—need. We urge this committee to support its swift passage. Thank you.