



## CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

### ORDER FOR A HEARING TO DISCUSS RETAIL THEFT AND THE IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

- WHEREAS:** Residents and small business owners continue to call attention to the retail theft across the City of Boston. Retail theft impacts not only our small businesses due to the loss of merchandise, but it also incentivizes raising prices for consumers on goods to compensate for lost revenue; *and*
- WHEREAS:** Residents also have concerns about the consequences of theft on their quality of life. For years, due to the impacts of the opioid crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, retailers have been forced to lock up products - from soap and shower products, razor blades, baby formula, and others. More often than not, consumers are required to press a button to call a clerk to unlock, access, and purchase everyday household items; *and*
- WHEREAS:** Beginning in 2019, the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office implemented a policy that would look to dismiss most cases involving 15 nonviolent misdemeanors - including trespassing, shoplifting (including offenses that are essentially shoplifting but charged as larceny), larceny under \$250, disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, receiving stolen property, breaking and entering - where it is into a vacant property or where it is for the purpose of sleeping or seeking refuge from the cold and there is no actual damage to property, drug possession, and drug possession with intent to distribute; *and*
- WHEREAS:** According to the data from the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan think tank, shoplifting increased in Boston by 27% from the first half of 2023 through the same period in 2024, and 55% from the first half of 2019 to the same period in 2024. Industry experts have also noted those figures may be conservative estimates due to varying policies between stores on reporting low-level offenses; *and*
- WHEREAS:** In 2018, the larceny limit was raised from \$250 to \$1,200. Any theft under that amount is considered shoplifting, a misdemeanor that can result in one year in jail or a \$300 fine. Felony larceny, on the other hand, can carry up to five years in prison or a \$25,000 fine. Because the penalties for shoplifting are much lighter, it reduces the risk of serious punishment and may potentially encourage repeat offenders and sophisticated criminals, as small businesses have called attention to offender awareness of the \$1,200 larceny threshold; *and*
- WHEREAS:** According to reports in 2023, Boston Police Commissioner Cox indicated, shoplifting increased by 93% compared to 2019. More recently, according to the Citywide Part One Property Crime report, the category of "Other Larceny" has increased from 4,046 from January 1, 2024 to July 6, 2024 to 4,185 from January

1, 2025 to July 6, 2025; *and*

**WHEREAS:** The City of Boston's Safe Shopping Initiative partners with with Boston Police, the District Attorney's office, and local businesses to address shoplifting and prevent shoplifting from becoming violent; *and*

**WHEREAS:** Due to both the opioid and Mass & Cass crisis, increased shoplifting in recent years, and quality of life concerns from residents simply purchasing household items, it is appropriate to discuss the impact of retail theft on our residents and small businesses. It is critical to address these concerns, evaluate the impacts of recent and existing policies, and take meaningful steps to protect the city's economic vitality and quality of life of those who live, work, and shop here; *and*

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED:**

That the appropriate Committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to discuss the impact of retail theft on small businesses and the residents of Boston. Representatives from the Boston Police, the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion, the Law Department, and other relevant and interested parties shall be invited to testify.

**Filed on: September 10, 2025**