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District Attorney Brings Fight Against Organized Retail Theft Rings to the National Stage

DA Stephan Calls for Building Partnerships with Businesses & Law Enforcement

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan joined the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for a virtual panel discussion on Thursday to strategize on ways to stop organized retail crime, which has spiked significantly in the past five years. This theft is perpetrated by organized criminal rings that steal large amounts of goods from businesses of all types and sizes with the intent to resell them, particularly through unregulated online marketplaces.

During the event, DA Stephan discussed the importance of building partnerships with businesses and law enforcement similar to the strong collaboration we have in the San Diego Organized Retail Crimes Alliance (ORCA), keeping employees and shoppers safe, and closing loopholes in laws that fail to bring accountability for serial theft and organized crime.

“I appreciate the U.S. Chamber of Commerce inviting us to join them to shine a light on this public safety issue that is wreaking havoc on small and large businesses and making employees and customers feel unsafe,” DA Stephan said. “We were also able to share best practices from San Diego County on holding these organized crime rings accountable while fighting to fix outdated state and federal laws that allow the unregulated sale of stolen goods online and provide little recourse to stop repeat offenders.”

In a recent San Diego case, two thieves were prosecuted for 42 felony counts of looting, grand theft, and burglary for breaking into ULTA Beauty, Nordstrom Rack and other stores during nighttime hours.

DA Stephan has taken a tough stance against organized retail thieves and is continuing to explore additional ways to hold these criminals accountable amid high-profile ‘smash and grab’ thefts across California. Stephan participated in a similar roundtable discussion earlier this summer with the Retail Industry Leaders Association and the National District Attorneys Association.

Beginning in 2019, with the passage of California’s Organized Retail Theft Law (PC 490.4), the San Diego DA’s Office began a partnership with the California Highway Patrol’s Organized Retail Theft team of special investigators. Since that time, a number of successful prosecutions have occurred. Crews of thieves coming to San Diego from other parts of the California have been prosecuted in a single case for all crimes they committed against retail stores up and down the state.

National retail groups estimate retail theft losses to be in the tens of billions of dollars each year. Locally, San Diego County has not seen the larger “smash and grab” incidents. Instead, it is seeing thefts carried out by organized crews of thieves, who are traveling around the state, hitting store after store

stealing fragrances, tools and electronics. Most of the arrests in these thefts are non-local residents who come to San Diego to steal.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.