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# DA Meets with Businesses in the County Aiming to Reduce Organized Retail Theft

## *Visits Come in Coordination with the NDAA's National Store Walk Month*

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) today pledged a renewed focus on fighting organized retail theft in San Diego County and holding thieves accountable. The DA met with ULTA Beauty loss prevention management and toured their San Marcos location which was hit last year by a team of thieves running an organized retail theft ring across Southern California. The San Marcos store was one of 21 ULTA Beauty stores targeted by one of the defendants who stole \$127,000 worth of fragrances in just one month.

During their last incident in 2022, the group encountered San Diego County Sheriff's Deputies who were waiting in the Ulta Beauty parking lot and took up pursuit. A bicyclist was hit by the defendants' car as they tried to avoid arrest. Eight bags of fragrances were found in the car with defendants. The defendants ultimately received sentences up to four years in state prison.

"We're holding organized retail theft crime rings accountable for the harm to retailers, their employees and customers who are often traumatized by these crimes," said DA Stephan. "Meeting with managers at stores in the county strengthens relationships and lines of communication that can help us build strong criminal cases to reduce this type of theft. We are committed to stop organized criminal rings from stealing large amounts of goods from small and large businesses with the intent to resell them, particularly through unregulated online marketplaces."

The DA's visit to the store is one of several being made at retail businesses in the county. The National District Attorney Association and the Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) announced National Store Walk Month recently with the goal of local prosecutors and retailers coming together to strengthen relationships and open direct lines of communication. DA Stephan or Deputy District Attorneys from her office are also participating in store walks at Home Depot, Dick's Sporting Goods, Target, Walmart, and Lowes stores.

In addition, DA Stephan toured Sunny Perfumes last week in San Ysidro, a small business that has also been targeted by retail thieves. The owner, Sunil Gakhreja, says he's spent thousands of dollars repairing smashed windows and adding metal shutters for security and has had to move



his more expensive items to the back of the store, making it more difficult for thieves to steal them. He also says that in addition to the loss of inventory to theft, criminals have threatened and even attacked his employees.

**EDITORS:** B-roll and a soundbite with the owner of [Sunny Perfumes can be found here.](#)

The DA also announced the assignment of specific prosecutors who will handle all organized retail theft cases that are submitted to the DA's Office in various jurisdictions. They will be focusing on stopping the organized theft crews and identifying the habitual offenders to try to assist large and small businesses who are struggling with the explosion of retail theft. The prosecutors will coordinate with stores to focus on the most serious offenders.

In a one-year period, the DA filed criminal cases involving organized retail theft against 77 defendants. In February of this year, two men were sentenced for a series of brazen organized retail theft crimes where multiple Sunglass Hut store locations were targeted, resulting in a reported loss of \$238,847. Hundreds of pairs of sunglasses were stolen from nine Sunglass Hut store locations, some of which were targeted more than once. The defendants also targeted other high-end stores, stealing more than \$4,000 in shoes from Nordstrom Rack, more than \$7,000 in merchandise from Bloomingdales, and over \$6,000 in jackets from Burberry. The defendants were both sentenced to 44 months in state prison.

The National Retail Federation (NRF) reported that external theft, which includes organized retail crime, is the primary driver of retail "shrink." NRF's National Retail Security Survey released earlier this year revealed that organized retail theft reached \$94.5 billion in 2021, with retailers reporting an increase in violence and aggression associated with these crimes. The National Chamber of Commerce says 25 percent of small businesses report raising prices because of shoplifting and some retailers have been forced to shutter locations in response to rampant theft.

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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.*

