

HB 2648 -- COMBATING ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME ACT

SPONSOR: Wilson

This bill establishes the "Organized Retail Theft Coordination Center". The duties of the center include:

- (1) Coordinating State law enforcement duties related to organized retail theft investigations;
- (2) Establishing relationships with state and local law enforcement agencies and organizations and sharing information regarding organized retail theft threats with them;
- (3) Assisting law enforcement agencies with investigations of organized retail theft groups;
- (4) Establishing relationships with retail, transportation, and other companies determined to have significant interests related to organized retail theft threats, sharing information with those companies, collaborating on investigations and loss prevention, and providing a mechanism to receive investigative information from such companies;
- (5) Establishing a secure system for sharing information regarding organized retail theft using existing information systems at the Highway Patrol;
- (6) Tracking trends with respect to organized retail theft and releasing annual reports on such trends; and
- (7) Supporting training and technical assistance activities.

The Director of the Department of Public Safety will appoint a Director to serve as the head of the Center, who must be an experienced law enforcement officer. The Director of the Center will appoint a Deputy Director, to serve a term of no more than two years. The Director of the Center may hire additional staff as necessary to carry out the duties of the Center.

The Center will coordinate its activities with appropriate State agencies and centers responsible for countering transnational organized crime threats. The Director of the Center may enter into agreements with Federal, State, local, and private entities to facilitate the execution of the duties above.

The Director of the Center may approve the disclosure of certain information specified in the bill if the disclosure is operationally necessary.

The Director of the Department of Public Safety, in consultation with the Attorney General, must conduct an evaluation of existing State programs that provide grants, training, and technical support to law enforcement agencies to assist in countering organized retail theft and submit a joint report the General Assembly no later than March 1st, 2027 with results and recommendations stemming from the evaluation.

The bill requires the Director of the Department of Public Safety and the Attorney General to jointly issue formal guidance on modifying or expanding training and technical assistance designed to counter organized retail theft. The guidance will be delivered to relevant agencies and offices within the Department of Public Safety within 45 days of the report to the General Assembly.

On or before August 28, 2027, the Director of the Department of Public Safety will issue another report. This report will regard the establishment of the Center and include information specified in the bill related to the organized retail theft and the Center's structure and activities. Each August 28th thereafter, the Director of the Department of Public Safety will submit an annual report to the General Assembly that describes the activities of the Center during the previous year.

The Center will sunset after six years.