



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SHOPLIFTING PREVENTION®

Covid-19, Social Unrest and Shoplifting:

A Unique Opportunity for Retailers to Choose Education & Opportunity over Police, Punishment & Stigma
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Mask wearing is a surprisingly polarizing idea for Americans; conflicts, which often occur in the retail setting, have escalated to physical confrontation and even murder. Masks are key to stopping the spread of coronavirus but a lack consistent guidance, much less laws requiring or governing their use, creates dangerous conflicts in retail stores.

Conversely, shoplifting – which creates daily conflict in stores – is a crime in all 50 states. Theoretically, the response to shoplifting is not about guidance, politics or policy; it is about the law. Yet, the same inconsistency abounds; inconsistency in the widely varying policies and responses that exist from retailer to retailer, police department to police department and prosecutor to prosecutor – irrespective of state law. These inconsistencies lead to increased incidents of theft and dangerous encounters in and around retail stores.

Achieving the needed consistency in the criminal justice response and policy on shoplifters will, like the mask issue, be an arduous, politically charged public process. However, retailers have sole discretion in modifying their internal policies on apprehension and prosecution for first-time offenders as changing conditions require, just as many have recently done with mask-wearing policies.

Further highlighting the importance of consistency in both policy and execution of policy was the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer responding to an alleged retail theft. This tragedy not only touched a nerve in our nation, it prompted virtually every retail CEO to renew their commitment to diversity, inclusion and opportunity in their stores and the wider community. It shined an even brighter light on an overburdened system that is far more gravely broken than we knew or acknowledged.

The unfortunate reality is that social inequities still exist in both our policing and criminal justice systems and fixing them will be a long time in the making – just as correcting inconsistency of public policy will be. However, as so many retail CEO's recently suggested, retailers have a unique opportunity, even a social responsibility, to bring about change. In terms of low-level shoplifters and the engagement of police, the retail AP/LP industry has the power to employ a modern and innovative response based in education and opportunity over police and punishment - something that is now more relevant and reasonable than ever.

More than 79% of criminal justice professionals acknowledge shoplifting as a gateway crime. Retailers can use apprehensions of first-time offenders to not only close down that gateway but to reduce repeat offenses while embracing a socially responsible policy. Adopting a policy that applies education over prosecution also extracts your associates from the arrest equation for low-level offenses and allows retail AP/LP to apply the values of inclusion and opportunity to every level of the community.

In times of crisis, retailers are often ahead of the curve in making change. The industry leaders on NASP's Advisory Committee have already begun to examine the value of retail-led change in how we as an industry respond to shoplifting. The work started last year to build a National Shoplifting Prevention Coalition was not only innovative but, we now know, farsighted. The tenets and goals set out for the National Shoplifting Prevention Coalition are timelier than ever. The current state of our nation further amplifies the value of continuing down the Coalition path and the significance of using its collective voice to not only spark change but also support needed yet responsible police and criminal justice reform.

Please reach out to NASP at Coalition@ShopliftingPrevention.org or any member of the Advisory Committee to join the Coalition or learn more about how other retailers have begun adopting more socially responsible policies.