



House Committee on Judiciary

Mayor Miro Weinberger
Testimony on H. 534 - An act relating to retail theft
January 17, 2024



Mayor's 2024 Legislative Priorities

- Urgent Action on Vermont's Housing Shortage and Homelessness
- Climate Action and Energy Affordability
- Urgent Action on the Drug Crisis – Vermont's top public health and public safety issue
 - Create Cabinet-level Drug Crisis Official and centralized data center
 - Accelerate the recruitment and training of new police officers
 - Accelerate deployment of Opioid Settlement funds
 - Adapt our drug treatment system
 - Strengthen gun safety laws
 - **Modernize property crime statutes**
 - **Fund Justice system to clear pandemic backlog and restore accountability**



Incidents of retail theft over time

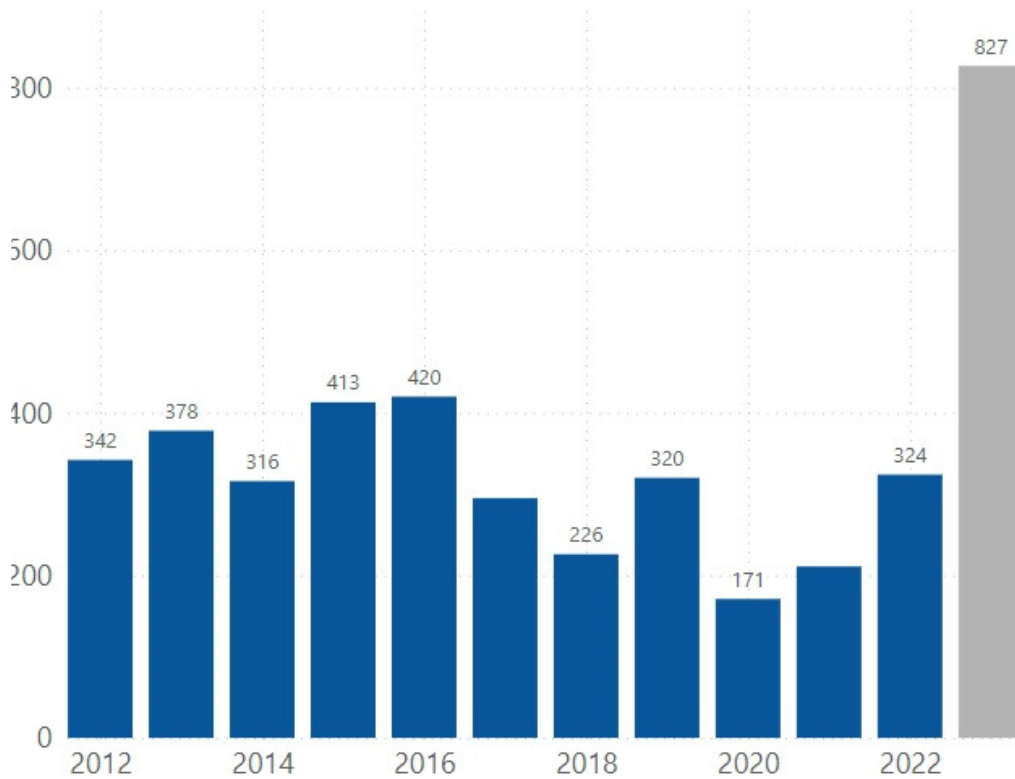
Retail theft is not a victimless crime, it is a big issue for our many small and locally-owned merchants who are the backbone of our vibrant and diverse local economy. We need the state to do more to support local law enforcement and prosecutors in stopping property crime, particularly among repeat offenders:

- According to FBI data, larceny offense counts are up statewide in Vermont from 6,581 in 2020 to 9,215 in 2022, and instances of motor vehicle theft have doubled in the same period.
- In Burlington, incidents for retail theft specifically more than doubled from 324 incidents in 2022, to 827 in 2023.

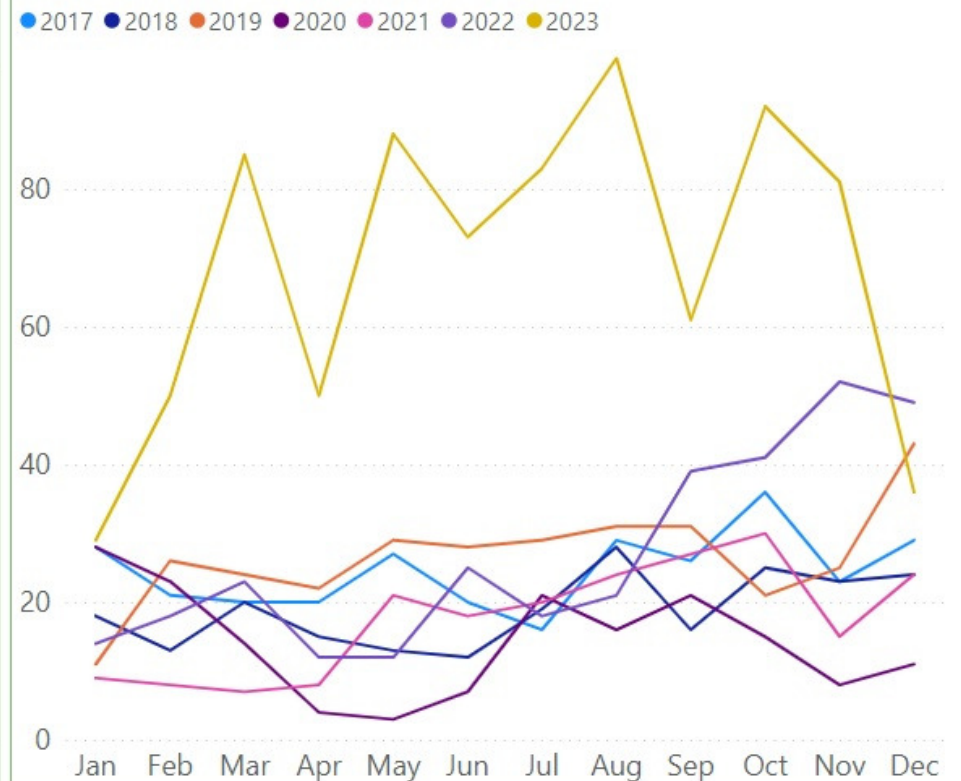


Incidents of retail theft over time

Total Incidents by Year



Incidents Over Month and Year





Priority: Modernize Property Crime Statute

Change vehicle theft statute to support prosecution: Vermont is an outlier in that it has no charge for larceny of a vehicle or larceny of a stolen vehicle, leaving officers and prosecutors to have to meet the much higher and sometimes absurd legal standard of “knowingly” operating the vehicle of another without consent.

Change shoplifting laws to address recidivism: Vermont’s current statute for the crimes of petit larceny and grand larceny are antiquated. Many states, including the neighboring state of New York, have theft laws that provide appropriate accountability for low-level and first-time offenses while allowing prosecutors and courts to consider aggregate charges to increase penalties for repeat offenders.

Fund Justice system to clear pandemic backlog and restore accountability. In Chittenden County over 970 pending cases are languishing in the post-pandemic backlog (6,620 statewide). This delays justice and erodes the efficacy of our diversion and treatment programs. The State should fund the expansion of judges and staff, and resources for state prosecutors, victim’s advocates, court diversion programs and pre-trial programs.