



'WE'RE GOING TO SUPPORT' SMALL BUSINESSES: DA SAYS CALIFORNIA'S PROP. 36 SHOULD HELP REDUCE RETAIL THEFTS - CRONKITE NEWS

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An armed security guard watches over LA Center Jewelry Inc., one of many storefronts in downtown Los Angeles' jewelry district, where business owners butt heads with opportunistic thieves.

A new California state law aims to minimize theft and retail crime, and while some officials applaud its passage, many residents doubt the measure's effectiveness.

The law allows law enforcement to charge people with felonies for thefts under \$950 if that person has two prior theft convictions. It's a change aimed at helping stave off burglaries that largely affect local businesses.

Prior to this year, officials couldn't charge people with felony crimes even if they stole items valued at less than \$950 numerous times. In the fall 2024, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 36, which was opposed by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

"I think it's a way of telling the businesses that we are going to do our jobs, and we're going to support you," said Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman. "Our job is to make sure that that's done without the small business getting ripped off or getting stolen from."

However, some residents and shop owners doubt that the new law will actually make a difference.

"Theft is high in California. People are going to keep stealing," said Brian Carter, a Downtown Los Angeles resident. "And they're going to just keep stealing right into that dollar amount."

Carter said he sees theft almost every day at local shops and businesses near his apartment. He doesn't think the law will deter thieves, despite potential legal consequences.

He said the law still doesn't help security guards, who often put themselves in harm's way to prevent burglary.

"I think it makes jobs harder for security guards and police. That's stressful," Carter said. "A lot of these people, if they're at the point where they're going to steal it, they're fighting for something else."

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, which examined data from 2023 California Department of Justice findings, shoplifting, which is entering a store while it's open with the intent to steal, [surged 29.3% from 2019 to 2023 statewide](#).

Rates of burglaries, which carries a heavier penalty and applies when thieves break into a business or otherwise closed premises with the intent to steal, however, dropped from 2022 to 2023. According to [2023 public records](#) published by the California Department of Justice, the statewide burglary rate was 347.4 burglaries per 100,000 people, a decrease of 7.8% from 2022.

From 2018 to 2023, the burglary rate decreased by 18%, according to the data. Commercial burglaries decreased by 5.8% from 2022 to 2023.

Some shop owners are feeling the pressure to stop thieves themselves, said Mehrdad Shirazi, the owner of Globe Jewelry Store in downtown LA.

He said he often worries about his jewelry store being robbed because of his insurance policy.

"Most of the insurance won't cover us," he said. "They won't cover us if we get robbed a couple times, you know? They want to be on the safe side, so they won't cover us."

His shop sells necklaces, rings and earrings. Many are made of gold or other precious metals, he said.

And without the possibility of arrest, Shirazi worries thieves will feel free to steal whatever they want.

"The thieves can do whatever they want, you know?" He said. "They don't get arrested if they steal less than , so they come and grab and run."

He said he wasn't aware of the passage of the new law, and he hopes it will become more well-known in California so thieves become aware of the consequences.

Hochman, the district attorney, agreed that raising awareness around the new law is important. If enough people know about the consequences, theft rates may drop.

"Millions of people voted for this proposition, overwhelmingly," he said. "The people it was really targeting, which are these chronic thieves ... they're learning about this bill."