

**December 1, 2022**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL CHARGES COOK COUNTY MAN FOR ALLEGEDLY STEALING MORE THAN \$800,000 IN RETAIL GOODS**

***Charges Stem from Organized Retail Crime Task Force's 2021 Storage Unit Bust***

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced criminal charges against a Cook County man over the alleged theft of more than \$800,000 in retail goods. The charges are the result of an investigation by Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force [that recovered thousands of stolen items at several storage units in the Chicago area in December 2021](#).

Raoul's office charged Mahdi Alhaw, 31, of Justice, Illinois, with eight counts of non-probationable Class 1 felony theft, each punishable by up to 15 years in prison, and four counts of Class 1 probationable felony theft, each punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Alhaw's bond was set at \$25,000, and his next court date is scheduled for January 30.

"Organized retail crime is a multibillion dollar per year industry, but more important than the financial cost is the danger organized retail crime poses to our communities. These crimes are committed by sophisticated criminal organizations that are involved in drug and gun trafficking and other serious crimes," Raoul said. "These charges should serve as a warning that my office and our partners in the Organized Retail Crime Task Force will aggressively pursue these offenders and hold them accountable."

Today's charges result from a multi-agency investigation by Raoul's [Organized Retail Crime Task Force](#). During a search of Alhaw's vehicle, the Chicago Police Department recovered items that led investigators with Raoul's task force to several storage units where stolen merchandise was recovered. The storage units contained four semitrailers of merchandise, including clothing, electronics, cosmetics, mattresses, pet supplies and other items. BNSF Railway Police also contributed to the investigation.

"Organized retail theft is a concern for BNSF and all freight railroads as we work round the clock to deliver all the freight our customers need shipped and U.S. consumers rely on," said BNSF Railway Chief of Police Bryan Laurie. "We welcome the Illinois General Assembly's work to strengthen laws on the books and the cooperation of the Attorney General to bring charges against those responsible."

In addition to the charges brought by the Attorney General's office, Alhaw faces charges brought by the Cook County State's Attorney's office related to alleged vehicle theft and gun crimes.

The Attorney General's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is the first statewide public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois, and it investigates and prosecutes individuals who are engaged in this type of criminal enterprise. In addition to establishing the task force, Attorney General Raoul initiated legislation to create and specifically define organized retail crime in state law. The new law, [signed in May](#), puts in place stronger oversight of online marketplaces to curb actors who exploit these legitimate platforms to illegally sell stolen goods. Additionally, the law requires online marketplaces to verify the identity of high-volume sellers, which will help police outlets used to monetize stolen merchandise. The law also creates a statewide intelligence platform to help retailers and law enforcement agencies better coordinate their enforcement efforts.

The law also aims to reduce a criminal's ability to avoid prosecution for organized retail crime by allowing any state's attorney where any element of organized retail crime takes place to prosecute the whole crime. Additionally, the new law gives the Attorney General's office authority to utilize the statewide grand jury to prosecute organized retail crime. In addition, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million to the Attorney

General's office to award grants to state's attorneys' offices and law enforcement agencies that investigate and prosecute organized retail crime.

The public is reminded the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Supervisory Assistant Attorney General Megan McGuire Bachman from Raoul's Criminal Trials and Prosecutions Bureau and Assistant Attorney General Haley Bookhout from Raoul's Public Integrity Bureau are handling the case.



December 3, 2021

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL'S ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME TASK FORCE RECOVERS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF STOLEN GOODS**

***Investigators Conduct Search of Storage Units and Locate Goods Worth Millions of Dollars***

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced that his Organized Retail Crime Task Force recovered thousands of stolen goods at several storage units in the Chicago area. This is the first major bust as a result of the work of the Organized Retail Crime Task Force that is spearheaded by the Attorney General's office.

"The stolen merchandise recovered by the Organized Retail Crime Task Force includes tens of thousands of products worth millions of dollars, and I appreciate the cooperation of our partners in law enforcement and retail as we continue to investigate this massive theft," Raoul said. "Organized retail theft is about more than lost revenue and stolen products. Frequently, the criminal enterprises behind these crimes are connected to other crimes, such as the drug trade and human trafficking. I am committed to identifying the perpetrators behind this and other organized retail crimes in Illinois."

Investigators with Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force, with support from Chicago law enforcement including the Chicago Police Department, executed search warrants at eight storage units in two locations. The units contained four semitrailers of merchandise, including apparel, beauty products, furniture, food items and electronics from multiple nationwide retailers. While a complete inventory is ongoing, the stolen goods are estimated to be worth millions of dollars.

The Organized Retail Crime Task Force's investigation will continue over the coming weeks.

The Attorney General's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is the first statewide, public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois and is designed to foster cooperation among retailers, online marketplaces, law enforcement agencies and state's attorneys dedicated to targeting organized retail crime enterprises. The task force allows Raoul's office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers and partner across jurisdictions with law enforcement agencies, similar to the investigation into today's retail theft case, to investigate organized retail crimes and trace thefts to the source. Raoul's goal in establishing the task force is to improve communication among public and private entities and utilize a multifaceted approach to combatting organized retail theft and related criminal activity.

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September 13, 2021

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL ANNOUNCES PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP AIMED AT DISRUPTING ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIMES**

***Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force to Work Closely with Retail and Federal, State And Local Law Enforcement to Investigate Organized Retail Crimes***

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced a partnership between public and private entities designed to combat the increase in organized retail crime. The Attorney General's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is the first large-scale, public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois and is designed to foster cooperation among retailers, online marketplaces, law enforcement agencies and state's attorneys dedicated to targeting organized retail crime enterprises.

Attorney General Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force is comprised of career investigators and attorneys from the Attorney General's Criminal Enforcement Division working in concert with the U.S. Secret Service, the Department of Homeland Security, the Illinois State Police, the Barrington Police Department, the West Chicago Police Department, the Cook County Sheriff's office, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police and the Illinois Association of State's Attorneys. The task force will consult with the Illinois Retail Merchants Association, the Magnificent Mile Association, the Chicago Automobile Trade Association, the Internet Association, as well as national retailers including CVS, Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Walgreens and Walmart.

"Organized retail crime is a multibillion dollar per year industry, but more important than the financial cost is the danger organized retail crime poses to our communities. These brazen, violent crimes are committed by sophisticated criminal organizations that are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking and other serious crimes. Even during the looting we saw last year, we came to understand that some of these criminal acts were not merely opportunistic, but organized in advance," Raoul said. "The Organized Retail Crime Task Force will allow investigators and prosecutors in my office to better collaborate with our law enforcement partners and ensure cooperation between law enforcement, as well as retailers and online marketplaces, to protect communities, consumers and combat the rise in retail crime."

Organized retail crime has increased dramatically over the last two years. According to the Coalition of Law Enforcement and Retail, organized retail theft accounts for \$45 billion in annual losses. The Wall Street Journal reported that the average professional thief targeting CVS steals \$2,000 in just two minutes. Home Depot's investigations into organized retail crime networks have increased by 86% since 2016. The problem has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with CVS estimating a 30% increase in thefts. In 2020 Lowe's Home Improvement closed 25 organized retail crime cases amounting to \$1.3 million in losses, compared to 20 cases amounting to \$388,000 in losses in 2019.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin has spearheaded a call for federal action to address organized retail crime by introducing bipartisan Senate legislation, the INFORM Consumers Act, to promote transparency and verification on online marketplaces in order to deter illicit sellers from using the marketplaces to re-sell stolen goods.

"I commend Attorney General Raoul for his initiative to crack down on the growing problem of organized retail crime. Billions of dollars of goods - from cosmetics to medicines to power tools- are stolen each year from retailers and are hawked to unwitting consumers, increasingly through online marketplaces," Durbin said. "This criminal business model is growing in scale, and we need to increase our efforts to prevent and stop these crimes. In the U.S. Senate, I have introduced bipartisan legislation, the INFORM Consumers Act, to promote transparency and verification on online marketplaces in order to deter shadowy illicit sellers from using these marketplaces to re-sell stolen goods. I look forward to working together with Attorney General Raoul to address this growing problem across all levels of government."

Organized retail crime and retail fraud can be mistaken for isolated incidents committed by low-level offenders; however, organized crime rings are often behind these incidents. Crime rings connected to the drug trade, human trafficking and other forms of crime target big box stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, auto dealerships and other retailers to carry out sophisticated theft operations and operate across county and state borders. Rings coordinate the theft of large amounts of items – using mules including people who are homeless, indigent or addicted to drugs – that are resold below market value using online marketplaces. The danger of organized crime goes beyond lost revenue. In discussions with the Attorney General’s office, retailers have raised concerns related to the safety of employees who confront thieves or customers who are bystanders to these crimes. Consumer safety is also at risk when expired items, such as baby formula or medicine, are resold online.

Because retail crimes are often coordinated by organized crime outfits, various law enforcement agencies may be investigating the same target in different communities. Without sufficient coordination, both agencies can be lead to believe that they are dealing with isolated actors rather than a pattern of organized crime. Raoul’s task force will, for the first time, facilitate improved collaboration between federal, state and local law enforcement and retailers, and utilize a wide-ranging approach to stop organized retail crime at the source. Attorney General Raoul’s Organized Retail Crime Task Force will serve as a vehicle allowing multiple jurisdictions to share information and resources.

The task force will allow Raoul’s office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers and partner across jurisdictions with law enforcement agencies to investigate organized retail crimes and trace thefts to the source. Raoul’s goal in establishing the task force is to improve communication among public and private entities and utilize a multifaceted approach to combatting organized retail theft and related criminal activity. For the first time, organized retail crime investigations will not be limited by county lines, ultimately leading to the arrest and prosecution of the organizations responsible.

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May 13, 2022

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL APPLAUDS SIGNING OF LEGISLATION TO COMBAT THE RISE IN ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME**

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today applauded Gov. J.B. Pritzker for signing legislation Raoul initiated to combat the rise in organized retail crime and disrupt the criminal enterprises that engage in and profit from organized retail theft.

Raoul, in partnership with the Illinois Retail Merchants Association (IRMA), initiated House Bill 1091 to address organized retail crime throughout the state of Illinois. The new law closes gaps in current Illinois law by defining the offense of organized retail crime, which will provide law enforcement with more tools to investigate and prosecute the actors who orchestrate these criminal activities.

“Serious criminal activities, including gunrunning and drug trafficking, have been funded using proceeds from the sales of merchandise stolen through organized retail crimes. This is not just a criminal problem – this hurts consumers as well. That is why we need online marketplaces to do their part. Online marketplaces must use their intellectual resources to make sure criminals are not selling stolen products on their sites, which will help us protect consumers,” Raoul said. “This law strengthens the authority of my office and other law enforcement agencies to disrupt criminal enterprises that are directly responsible for the rise in organized retail crime. I appreciate Gov. Pritzker’s signing of this important law, as well as the leadership of Sen. Glowiak Hilton and Rep. Kam Buckner in guiding this bipartisan proposal through the Illinois General Assembly.”

“This new law represents another important step to fight crime and advance public safety in Illinois,” Governor Pritzker said. “This is how we protect store workers and customers, prevent militarized storefronts and empty commercial corridors, and across the board, make communities safer for all who call them home. And I look forward to furthering our work to shape a public safety system that works for all of us, including ensuring the victim rights advanced today are carried throughout our justice system.”

“Organized retail crimes across the state have disturbed residents, wreaked havoc on businesses and stunted growth within local economies,” Glowiak Hilton said. “By advancing the Organized Retail Crime Act, Illinois is enacting one of the most comprehensive crime-curbing efforts in the nation.”

“One of my top priorities this session has been to address the organized retail theft that has been plaguing both downtown Chicago and the small businesses across our neighborhoods,” said Buckner. “Between inflation and the lingering effects of the pandemic, local businesses are already facing major obstacles. By creating a specific offense for this crime, we can protect the local businesses and residents who are being targeted by criminal enterprises, which will then protect the safety and economic wellbeing of communities across Chicago and the state.”

“Organized retail crime is not a victimless crime. It threatens the safety of employees and customers, robs businesses of tax dollars and puts communities at risk of further crime including illegal firearm purchases, human trafficking and even terrorism. We thank Governor Pritzker for signing this important measure into law, creating additional avenues to combat these complex crimes and provide for safer communities,” Rob Karr, president & CEO, IRMA said. “I want to thank Attorney General Raoul for his partnership in combatting the rising issue of organized retail crime, as well as every lawmaker who supported and voted in favor of this measure that will help protect retailers, employees and customers across the state.”

The new law creates and specifically defines organized retail crime in Illinois law. Organized retail crime and retail fraud are often mistakenly viewed as being isolated incidents; however, organized crime rings that commit a series of serious crimes are often behind these acts. Organized criminal enterprises connected to the drug trade, human trafficking and other criminal activities target big box stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, auto dealerships and other retailers to carry out sophisticated theft operations, and these operations cross county and state borders. Enterprises use boosters and mules to coordinate thefts of large amounts of

merchandise, which is then resold below market value using online marketplaces in order to fund the enterprise's other illegal activities.

The new law puts in place stronger oversight of these online marketplaces to curb actors who use these exploit these legitimate platforms to illegally sell stolen goods. It also creates a statewide intelligence platform to help retailers and law enforcement agencies better coordinate their enforcement efforts. Additionally, the new law requires online marketplaces to verify the identity of high-volume sellers. This will help police outlets used to monetize stolen merchandise.

The law also aims to reduce a criminal's ability to avoid prosecution for organized retail crime. It would allow any state's attorney where any element of organized retail crime takes place to prosecute the whole crime. Under the law, people participating in smash and grab robberies, as well as looting of supply chain vehicles such as trains and cargo trucks, could also be prosecuted for organized retail crime. The new law would also provide the Attorney General's office authority to utilize the statewide grand jury to prosecute organized retail crime. In addition, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million to the Attorney General's office to award grants to state's attorney's offices and law enforcement agencies that investigate and prosecute organized retail crime.

The new law builds on the work of Attorney General Raoul's Organized Retail Crime Task Force, the first statewide, public-private collaboration of its kind in Illinois. The task force is designed to foster cooperation among retailers, online marketplaces, law enforcement agencies and state's attorneys dedicated to targeting organized retail crime enterprises. The task force allows Raoul's office to utilize data and tips provided by retailers and partner across jurisdictions with law enforcement agencies to investigate organized retail crimes and trace thefts to the source. For example, the Organized Retail Crime Task Force, with support from Chicago law enforcement recovered more than \$1 million worth of stolen goods from several Chicago-area storage units during December 2021. Raoul's goal in establishing the task force is to continue to improve communication among public and private entities and utilize a multifaceted approach to combatting organized retail theft and related criminal activity.

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