

LANDER

for Mayor

Unlock the Toothpaste!

Combatting Retail Theft

As part of his broader Public Safety plan, Brad will make our city safer and more livable by confronting the surge of retail theft with an innovative online platform for retailers to more easily report and prevent shoplifting, and free up items from being locked up in drug stores.

Introduction

Retail theft and organized retail crime harm New Yorkers – they hurt businesses small and large, contribute to store closures and vacant storefronts, and create huge headaches for consumers. New Yorkers should be able to purchase everyday essentials without waiting for store staff to unlock the toothpaste, and local businesses should be shielded from profit losses and crime incidents that can escalate. Brad’s comprehensive public safety plan will include a simple, one-stop platform that retail stores can opt into to streamline reporting to the NYPD, helping with timely response, investigations, and trespass warrants. As the system works to curb shoplifting, stores will be required to unlock items and restore the customer shopping experience..

The Problem

Retail theft in New York City undermines the economic health of local businesses, strains resources, and forces consumers to purchase everyday essentials from behind locked glass – and it’s surging. The number of [shoplifting incidents in NYC saw a whopping 68.1% increase in 2022 compared to 2019, resulting in over 25,000 additional thefts](#). Despite a 7.3% decline in 2023, shoplifting remained at historically high levels, marking the second-highest year on record and representing a 56% increase since 2019 – an increase made even more significant by the fact that the number of shoplifting incidents occurred even as the city’s retail sector was shrinking.

Small independent businesses and large chain stores alike are affected by retail theft, with [Business Improvement Districts \(BIDs\) like Church Avenue and Flatbush-Nostrand Junction experiencing particularly dramatic increases of 32.1% and 39.7%, respectively](#). These losses hit especially hard for our City’s small businesses that often operate on narrow profit margins, and are then forced to spend operating costs on enhanced security measures and insurance premiums. [Shoplifting incidents are unfortunately becoming more violent](#) with incidents involving force or threat of force 75% higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Many stories have responded by putting products behind lock-and-key, a huge problem for customers, which is also [tanking sales](#) for businesses. Frustrated and law-abiding New Yorkers are opting to purchase products online to avoid long waits and chaotic customer experiences at brick-and-mortar stores.

Much retail theft currently goes unreported, which causes the problem to grow. A survey found that 55% of businesses think reporting theft is too time-consuming, 49% hesitate to involve the police, and 34% doubt law

enforcement's effectiveness. Consequently, a handful of large retailers (18 department stores and 7 chain pharmacies making up 20% of theft reports, with chain retailers overall at 75%) dominate reporting, which disproportionately hurts small businesses.

Brad's Solution

Brad's plan will reduce reporting barriers, expedite investigations and enforcement through improved data and stakeholder coordination, and target repeat offenders with a mix of enforcement and evidence-based diversion programs, as well as education and training to reduce violence and the inadvertent public consumption of stolen goods.

A central component is launching a simple, one-stop platform for retail stores to streamline reporting to the NYPD, investigating, and preventing shoplifting—a move that will help confront the surge of retail theft that has forced toothpaste behind lock and key. **As Mayor, Brad will:**

1. Reduce barriers to reporting

Create a simple one-stop platform that stores can opt into to streamline reporting to the NYPD, investigating and preventing theft, and requires stores to remove barriers that keep products behind lock-and-key as shoplifting declines. The site would make it easy for stores to:

- **Quickly report shoplifting at the touch of a button**, rather than call 911.
- **Integrate retail store cameras with NYPD**, so they can quickly access footage, without red tape slowing down the process.
- **Enable NYPD to develop a database of shoplifting across stores**, to more easily identify repeat offenders.
- Improved data collaboration will help **District Attorneys to issue trespass warrants** more easily and **boost clearance rates**.

Participating stores will be required to remove barriers that keep products behind lock-and-key – starting with low-cost items like toothpaste and deodorant, based on a percentage threshold system: as theft decreases by a certain amount, participating stores will commit to unlocking a corresponding quantity of items.

2. Expedite effective enforcement

- **Forge better interagency partnerships for stronger investigation and enforcement** to improve the government's capacity to investigate and enforce against online marketplaces selling stolen goods.
- **Leverage data and interagency partnership to focus on repeat offenders.** In 2022, just 327 individuals accounted for 6,600 shoplifting arrests – and in 2024, the Manhattan DA reported that from 2015 to 2021, 18% of shoplifting arrestees accounted for 42% of shoplifting arrests.
- **Issue swift consequences for retail theft.** Brad supports the [Manhattan District Attorney's focused deterrence approach](#) which ensures speedy consequences for those doing the most damage while also ensuring a narrow focus on the specific people needed to make the biggest impact. Through regular meetings with District Attorneys, NYPD, businesses BIDs and merchant associations, Brad will be able to sharply monitor and increase real-time communication between the City and businesses.
- **Enhance enforcement efforts against brick-and-mortar businesses that engage in resale of stolen goods.** [Leveraging existing enforcement mechanisms](#), Brad will ensure the City creates stronger

disincentives for these businesses to participate in fencing. Since these establishments have a vested interest in maintaining their legal operations, targeted enforcement and additional penalties will effectively deter their involvement in illegal resales. Brad supports the [State's recent efforts to identify and enforce against online marketplaces selling stolen goods](#).

- Make grant funding available for **small businesses to upgrade security cameras**.

3. Establish evidence-based diversion, public education, and training

- **Leverage evidence-based programs to address repeat non-violent offenders and those with drug habits.** Recognizing that many repeat retail offenders struggle with substance abuse, he will strengthen these programs through enhanced prosecution, treatment for drug users, and diversion initiatives (like the effective drug treatment courts sponsored by the Center for Justice Innovation).
- **Connect repeat offenders to support services** through better coordinated services such as Brad's plan for [ending street homelessness](#).
- **Spearhead public education projects** to [protect consumers from inadvertently buying stolen goods online](#).
- **Train in-workplace violence prevention, de-escalation and emergency procedures.** Brad supports RWDSU's recent victory, which resulted in the successful passage and the Governor's signing of the [Retail Worker Safety Act](#). In addition to training, the [act requires](#) large employers to provide panic buttons in case of emergency, which can be integrated with the online reporting system. Brad will continue to work with workers and unions to understand what support they need in order to ensure properly staffed, safe work environments.

The Results

Brad's comprehensive public safety plan emphasizes accountability, strategic leadership, community collaboration, and data-driven policing to improve safety and rebuild trust. Key results include:

- **Significant reduction in retail theft.**
- **Easier shopping experiences for New Yorkers.**
- **Reduction in shoplifting-related violence.**
- **Streamlined red tape for impacted businesses.**
- **Reduction in recidivism due to therapeutic programs and access to supports for repeat offenders.**