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City Attorney's Office Releases 2012 Theft Stats

Prosecutors see a 400 percent increase in thefts over \$500 last year

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. released information today on the misdemeanor theft charges his office filed in 2012 and the numbers show a host of increases when compared to data from recent years.

The City Attorney's Prosecution Division filed a total of 3590 theft charges last year, almost 200 more than 2011. The total value of merchandise stolen increased from \$339,411.14 in 2011 to \$422,940.19 in 2012. The average value of each theft also increased, from \$99.91 in 2011 to \$117.81 last year.

“Shoplifting and retail theft is a nationwide scourge,” said City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. “Some estimate that over \$10 billion worth of goods are stolen from U.S. merchants each year and those costs unfortunately are passed onto consumers.”

The number of cases where the total value of goods stolen exceeded \$500 rose over 400 percent—from 32 in 2011 to 134 in 2012. Prosecutors attribute this increase to the fact that changes in state law, which increased the threshold between misdemeanor and felony theft charges from \$500 to \$1000, were in effect for the full year for the first time in 2012.

One of the few statistics that decreased in 2012 was the number of cases filed against first-time offenders. In 2009, 42 percent of theft charges involved first-time offenders whereas that number plunged to 26 percent in 2012—meaning nearly three-quarters of all theft cases were perpetrated by individuals with prior criminal charges.

Assistant City Prosecutor Bill R. Hedrick doesn't think these statistics are coincidental or unrelated. Hedrick believes chronic shoplifters, or serial thieves as he calls them, are well aware that state law currently allows them to steal twice as much as they could in the past without facing felony charges.

“These serial thieves practically steal for a living, as though it is their fulltime job,” said Assistant City Prosecutor Bill R. Hedrick. “Knowing they can steal up to a thousand dollars without facing felony charges to them is like knowing their workplace rules.”

Hedrick monitors the theft data and leads a fugitive apprehension program on behalf of City Attorney Pfeiffer.

Per state law, the Columbus City Attorney's office only handles misdemeanors, not felonies.

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