



Musgrave Group

Musgrave House,
Ballycurreen,
Airport Road, Cork,
Ireland. T12 TN99

T: +353 (0) 21 452 2100

E: group@musgrave.ie
musgravegroup.com

Musgrave Group Opening Statement: Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Shoplifting and how it is affecting retailers

As Ireland's leading food retailer, wholesale and foodservice company, Musgrave, together with our retail partners, support more than 41,000 jobs, in more than 1000 stores, warehouses and offices. Every day we feed one in three people in Ireland through 15 market leading food and beverage brands.

Through our retail brands SuperValu, Centra and Daybreak, we are at the heart of local communities across the length and breadth of the country. We partner with independent retailers who together with their staff work tirelessly every day serving their friends, neighbours and the wider local community.

In many communities around the country, the local SuperValu or Centra is a key employer – in fact the average SuperValu employs between 80 and 100 people; and the average Centra between 25-30 people.

The operating environment within the retail sector has changed in many ways over the last number of years however worryingly, in particular over the last two years, the levels of crime, violence and anti-social behaviour towards staff are at an all-time high.

Retailers are experiencing three types of crime – organised gangs; opportunistic criminals and an alarming rise in underage youths who get a kick out of intimidating staff and who are totally lacking in fear given there are little or no repercussions for their actions.

Shoplifting sounds like an innocuous word, what harm can it do, but it is not a victimless crime. Retail is a low margin business and stock walking out the door daily has a serious impact on a retailer's profit for the week – money that pays the wages, pays the taxes and keeps the lights on.

More than that - there is the impact on staff of being verbally abused, threatened and intimidated. Nobody should come to work and feel threatened and unsafe while doing an honest day's work. For the individuals themselves this is terrifying. Retailers are very concerned for the safety and wellbeing of their staff. They are also worried that staff will not want to return at a time when retaining and attracting staff is already a challenge.

We talk to retailers every day who tell us about an upsurge in theft and anti-social behaviour and the debilitating effect it is having on both themselves and their staff both emotionally and physically. Across our network, there could be over 1000 issues a week that mainly go unreported – this fully supports survey findings from RGDATA which describe the situation as "out of control".

I am joined here today by my colleague Noel Dunne who is a Centra retailer in Dublin and who is currently dealing with two to three incidents a day. Noel can provide you with more detail later in proceedings.



In addition to the emotional impact on retail workers, the financial cost and implications associated with retail crime are significant at a time when independent retailers are facing a barrage of increased costs. International events have driven up a range of input prices, especially energy where costs remain at more than double pre-Covid levels. Domestically, retailers are dealing with the cumulative financial impact of a number of Government measures including living wage and sick pay. Further labour costs increases are planned including pension auto-enrolment.

We are awaiting the publication of the Retail Costs Audit as recommended by the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council to highlight the increased burden faced by retail SMEs.

Without greater supports in the current economic climate, independent retailers are increasingly coming under pressure to retain existing employment levels and maintain opening hours. In a highly competitive environment, all additional costs such as those resulting from theft increase the threat to the viability of some retailers.

Retail crime is not victimless, it has an impact on owners, colleagues, and customers.

It is an issue that has been raised and discussed with the Gardai on a number of occasions over the last year including at the Retail Forum chaired by Minister Richmond. We fully appreciate there is no silver bullet for tackling retail crime. However, we would welcome any steps that can be taken to address the situation and are willing to work with the relevant Government departments and trade bodies.

We were all appalled by the recent events in Dublin city centre and some of our stores are still dealing with the fall out.

We are asking Government to step up its efforts to tackle this issue to ensure as a sector we can keep our retailers, staff and customers safe. The recruitment of more Gardaí for frontline policing duties would be welcomed. However, there is a need for a responsive, resourced, and dedicated operation by Gardaí to tackle assaults on retail workers and theft from shops specifically.