



23 REVISED

Date: April 1, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Councilwoman Mary Zendejas, First Council District
Councilwoman Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, Eighth Council District
Vice Mayor, Roberto Uranga, Seventh District

Subject: Long Beach Grocery Stores and Drug Establishments Anti-Retail Theft Staffing Standards and Prevention

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation to request the City Manager to evaluate options for establishing labor standards requirements regarding staffing and operational standards for self-checkout operations (SCOs) in grocery retail stores and retail drug establishments in Long Beach to proactively address retail theft and advance the preservation of public safety and welfare, with the intention of developing an ordinance that would enact new self-checkout labor standards requirements for staffing and operations at subject grocery retail stores and retail drug establishments in Long Beach.

DISCUSSION

The Problem

The State of California is facing a dramatic increase in theft across its retail businesses, both in highly visible incidents such as “smash and grabs”, as well as subtler yet pervasive forms of shoplifting including thefts involving abuse or manipulation of self-checkout retail operations.¹ In 2022, California retail stores and small businesses lost nearly [\\$9 billion](#) as a result of theft. These issues are pronounced in California’s most populous counties, including Los Angeles County.

¹ Lofstrom, M., & Martin, B. (n.d.). *Commercial Burglaries Fell in 2023, but Shoplifting Continued to Rise*. PPIC. <https://www.ppic.org/blog/commercial-burglaries-fell-in-2023-but-shoplifting-continued-to-rise/>

Reliable estimates, based on surveys of retail businesses that have introduced SCO systems to a significant degree, indicate that self-checkout operations account for between twenty and twenty-five percent of those retailers' losses.²

Increased incidents of theft create hostile workplace conditions for retail employees, and unsafe environments for customers that undermine the customer service experience. In Long Beach, these issues have been exacerbated by inadequate staffing and operational standards that result in too few staff who are unable to provide effective oversight and protections against theft from SCOs.

This puts employees of these establishments at increased safety risk. Retail employees frequently face confrontations during active shoplifting and theft incidents, and these safety concerns are amplified when workers are outnumbered and lack the adequate staffing capacity to properly monitor and deter theft activities. Studies show that workers in stores with self-checkout operations are more likely to be disrespected and bullied.³ These issues are heightened by more than half of employees reporting understaffing of SCOs. Additionally, the majority of employees cited that they are unable to properly manage their increased supervision assignments over SCO machines.⁴ Self-checkout machines commonly experience technical glitches, which creates additional work for employees who are expected to monitor anywhere from 4 to 10 machines simultaneously - sometimes overseeing multiple kiosk locations at opposite ends of a store.

The City of Long Beach has prioritized strategies and partnerships to help prevent retail theft and deter individuals responsible for it. In 2025, city leaders launched a series of community roundtables to bring together public safety officials, employees, and business stakeholders to identify solutions that help address the impacts of retail crime. On March 12th, Mayor Richardson hosted a Retail Theft Roundtable with retail workers from grocery and drug retail establishments throughout Long Beach who shared jarring personal experiences about the chronic understaffing over SCO operations in their stores, the frequency of theft that occurs through SCO machines, and the associated increases in harassment, violence, and intimidation they have encountered due to being understaffed which, in some cases, has resulted in physical injury. These discussions affirmed the need and urgency to develop targeted public policy tools to disrupt and prevent retail theft in Long Beach retail establishments.

Additionally, the absence of adequate staffing and prevention measures to help monitor and deter theft activities in retail establishments also puts an unnecessary strain on local law

² Beck, Adrian. (n.d.). *Global Study on Self-Checkout in Retail Use, Impact and Control.*, ECR Retail Loss. <https://www.ecrloss.com/research/global-study-on-self-checkout-in-retail>

³ Harvard Kennedy School Shift Project. (2022). *Please Wait, Help is on the Way: Self-Checkout, Understaffing, and Customer Incivility in the Service Sector.*

⁴ Beck, A. (2022). *Working on the 'Front Line' of Retail Self-Checkout: A Survey of the Experiences of Self-Checkout Supervisors.*

enforcement resources, which are frequently called upon to respond to retail theft incidents. From 2023 to 2024, the Long Beach Police Department saw a [16% increase](#) citywide in petty theft property crimes of items valued at \$950 or less. Responding to these petty theft calls, which could be mitigated through adequate staffing levels within retail establishments, diverts the resources and capacity of LBPD officers to respond to other pressing public safety emergencies. Moreover, these theft activities deprive the city of critical sales tax revenues that would otherwise be realized to help fund core city services that the public depends on.

Solutions & Best Practices

Adequate staffing levels in retail establishments are critical in deterring retail theft, as multiple studies and industry reports have highlighted that the presence of sufficient staff significantly reduces the likelihood of shoplifting. Research by the [Loss Prevention Research Council](#) found that 44% of shoplifters said they would be less likely to steal if employees paid more attention to them while they were committing theft. High employee visibility through adequate staffing and presence in stores generates an “eyes and ears” effect that acts as an effective deterrent to shoplifters by allowing employees to maintain vigilance, closely monitor customer behavior, and spot potential theft. When staffing levels are high, employees can engage with customers more often, making it more difficult for potential shoplifters to act unnoticed, and reducing the overall opportunity for theft. Research has also shown that proper staffing at self-checkout operations has been linked to reduced theft, as well-staffed stores allow employees to better monitor and assist customers more effectively, especially in high-risk areas like self-checkouts.⁵

It is in the public’s interest to require retail establishments to adopt effective preventative measures that will limit the public burden that retail theft creates, especially within the context of self-checkout retail operations where theft commonly occurs but remains largely unchecked. This, in turn, would benefit businesses that adopt such measures, create safer working conditions for retail employees, and bolster public safety.

As city staff prepare recommendations for establishing staffing and operational requirements for self-checkout retail operations in local retail businesses to deter retail theft, staff should consider the following policy considerations to clarify and optimize the benefits of these proposed standards:

- **Scope of Coverage:** the proposed ordinance shall consider applicability over any drug retail or food retail establishments within the City of Long Beach that sell merchandise to the general public and that employ more than one self-service checkout station for use by individual customers within the establishment.
- **Drug Retail Establishments:** shall encompass retail stores that sell a variety of prescription and nonprescription medicines and miscellaneous items, including drugs, pharmaceuticals, sundries, fresh produce, meats, poultry, fish, deli products, dairy products, canned foods, dry foods, beverages, prepared foods, and other merchandise.

⁵ Moradi, P., Levy, K., & Cheyre, C. (2024). *Pseudo-Automation: How Labor-Offsetting Technologies Reconfigure Roles and Relationships in Frontline Retail Work*. arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2410.02888>

- *Food Retail Establishments*: shall encompass retail stores that are either (1) over 15,000 square feet in size and sell primarily household foodstuffs for offsite consumption including fresh produce, meats, poultry, fish, deli products, dairy products, canned foods, dry foods, beverages, baked foods and/or prepared foods (other household supplies or products are secondary to the primary purpose of food sales); or (2) over 85,000 square feet and with 10% of their sales floor area dedicated to the sale of non-taxable merchandise including the sale of fresh produce, meats, poultry, fish, deli products, dairy products, canned foods, dry foods, beverages, baked foods and/or prepared foods.
- *Self-Checkout Definition*: self-service checkout refers to automated processes that enable customers to scan, bag, and pay for their purchases without human assistance including but not limited to fixed self-checkout, scan-and-go self-checkout, or mobile self-checkout.
- *Self-Checkout Requirements*: subject retail establishments that provide self-service checkout options shall also provide at least one non-self-service checkout station staffed by an employee that is available during the times that a self-service checkout option is available to customers, and these establishments shall establish and advertise limits to self-service checkout to purchases of no more than 15 items.
- *Staffing Requirements*: subject retail establishments using self-service checkout stations shall assign at least one employee to supervise the operation of these stations at all times that the stations are in operation during business hours who has no other work responsibilities that would interfere with their ability to maintain direct visual inspection and surveillance of the stations; if establishments have two or more self-checkout stations, the proposed ordinance shall develop a standardized staffing supervision ratio of one employee to supervise the operation of no more than two stations (1:2), taking into consideration matters of operational and logistical feasibility in how the standard is ultimately operationalized.
- *Additional Considerations*: the proposed policy and recommendations from city staff should also contemplate prohibitions against using self-checkout to purchase certain items such as those requiring customers to provide identification (e.g., alcohol and tobacco products) and those subject to theft-deterrent measures requiring employee intervention for the customer to access or purchase the item (e.g., electronic article surveillance tags and locked cabinets); location and visibility requirements for self-checkout stations to enable adequate observation and surveillance from both establishment employees and local law enforcement; and a reasonable but meaningful structure for enforcement and penalties to ensure subject retail establishment comply with the staffing standards and other conditions outlined in the adopted policy such as financial penalties for specific violations and civil penalties enforced by the City of Long Beach, the court system, and through private right of action and enforcement.
- *Potential Enforcement and Penalties* include:
 - (1) A person or entity operating a retail establishment who fails to maintain the staffing levels prescribed by paragraph (c) of this Ordinance for a major part of an hour shall be liable for a civil penalty not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) for each such violation.
 - (2) Violations of this Ordinance may be prosecuted by civil action brought in the name of the people of the City of Long Beach by the City Attorney of the City of Long Beach, or by any person.
 - (3) The court shall impose a civil penalty for each violation of this chapter.

- (4) A person bringing a civil action for violation of this Ordinance shall be entitled to personally recover an amount equal to \$100 for each employee of the covered entity, with an additional \$100 per employee owed each day the violation isn't cured, up to a limit of \$1000 per employee for each day in which the violation isn't cured. Additionally, any individual who successfully bring an action for violation of this Section shall be entitled to attorney's fees and costs.

To help inform the proposed staffing standards and associated conditions for self-checkout retail operations, the Long Beach City Council will receive input and recommendations from city staff. Following City Council's consideration of staff recommendations, the Council will provide additional direction to the City Attorney's office on the scope and content of the proposed ordinance.

This item was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Ashleigh Stone on March 27, 2025 and will be subject to continuing analysis.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation requests the City Manager to return to City Council with options for establishing staffing and operational requirements for grocery retail stores and retail drug establishments, in addition to preparing an ordinance enacting new self-checkout labor standard requirements. Staffing and operational standards for self-checkout operations in grocery retail stores and retail drug establishment is expected to have a significant impact on staff resources to enforce compliance and a moderate impact on existing City Council priorities, including adding additional full-time employees, development of a comprehensive compliance enforcement program, and associated program and staffing costs. Staff will return with an evaluation of the scope and financial impacts and report back to the City Council.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,



Mary Zendejas, Councilwoman, First District



Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, Councilwoman, Eighth District

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Roberto Uranga". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "U".

Roberto Uranga, Vice Mayor, Seventh District