

CRA Meets with California Highway Patrol on Status of Organized Retail Crime Task Force

CRA met with Mike Alvarez and others with CHP to discuss the state of the ORC task force, receive an update on AB 331 and discuss next steps. CRA made the ask of Asm. Jones-Sawyer's office to get 331 language into the budget bill. CHP supports this action, which helps shore up some of the fiscal questions leaving whether or not the Admin wants to continue task force operations and what their goal of the task force is. CHP is having internal discussions with the Admin to determine what is needed under the umbrella of the task force and appreciates CRA making the public ask of Jones Sawyer, rather than CHP having to be the face of the advocacy.

Funding expires July 1 if AB 331 doesn't pass and get signed into law. Current and active CHP ORC investigations will continue and will not be dropped based on 331 outcome. CRA wants to be sure we keep relationships and do not lose connections to help with this issue as people begin to phase out. CRA is most impressed with border division and commander ship watch- both of which have been very active in combatting ORC. Golden Gate is also familiar with Bay Area partnerships developed- especially in San Francisco where ORC is a huge concern causing many retail store closures. The density and difficulty of coordinating across jurisdictions there complicates the issue.

SF and LA always come up as top areas that are problematic. Sacramento as well. NRF highlighted this with a study they came out with recently. CRA members are concerned with the trajectory -increase over past two years- and level of sophistication of ORC ring leaders. CRA has been contacted from all over the country to combat ORC in CA, which is at the epicenter of the issue. CRA shared recent testimony with SF County BOS and the national standard CA has set on combatting ORC. Retail members are concerned CA isn't doing enough to fight ORC so CRA's team has been working hard at the advocacy level but needs help from CHP to continue the fight.

CRA underscored the issue of vulnerable individuals being pulled in by ORC ring leaders- homeless, young people- that needs to be addressed ASAP. CRA also expressed concerns as to why CHP does not want to partner with CRA on this important issue. Communication needs to be improved so CRA can be better advocates for CHP as the team has direct lines into the Governor's office.

The ORC task force program is working- it has set national standards. *NY Times* covered the growing issue in SF, we must be able to come back and say we can fund the task force. After funding is secured, we need to discuss who will run the task force if CHP doesn't want to do it. The issue is too important to have an interruption – it is too important to consumers and Californians' public safety. CRA plans to continue to use every asset possible to secure the money, but we want to build the program- this is not possible if the program is taken down every couple of years.

Alvarez assured CRA that the CHP is committed to working with CRA on this issue, but their boss is the Admin so they are trying to figure out what the Admin's desire is as well. He thanked CRA for stepping in front of the fiscal aspect of it so the funding can be shored up. It is better that the request comes from CRA vs CHP in terms of budget trailer language asks. The Commissioner doesn't have the freedom to do this.

CHP reassured CRA that they are not reassigning officers and said they will find out why this message is coming across. Mike Alvarez: "a crime problem cannot be solved within a few years. This is an ongoing issue that needs to have a long-term response." Alvarez conveyed that he is impressed CRA got the bill pulled off Suspense.

The takeaway from the meeting: CRA will continue to work the Chair of the Budget subcommittee who is very supportive of combatting ORC- the issue is rampant in Senator Skinner's district so she is very engaged- CRA will also work to get more clarity from Admin. CRA is planning an ORC conversation in the Fall when leg session is over so we can continue the discussion on how to continue fighting ORC into the future. Alvarez agreed to this plan and next steps. He also assured CRA that the message that ORC is going away does not continue to proliferate and he will keep CRA apprised of what he hears from the Admin and CHP Commissioner.