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**Testimony of Attorney General Kris Kobach on SB 244
House Judiciary Committee**

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Chairman Patton and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Organized retail crime is a relatively new crime that involves the large-scale theft of retail merchandise with the intent to resell the items for financial gain. Unlike shoplifting where an individual steals for personal use, organized retail crime (ORC) often involves a criminal enterprise with multiple people stealing multiple items from multiple stores in multiple jurisdictions and then selling the stolen goods.

Many retailers now forgo attempting to stop thieves in the act, fearing violence in their stores that could hurt customers and their employees. So criminals simply load up shopping carts and head for the exit without paying. They load up a truck or van and head to the next big box store in a neighboring county.

This multi-jurisdictional enterprise hampers the ability of law enforcement to properly charge and penalize these crimes. Retail loss prevention teams and law enforcement efforts are hindered by the large scope of these crimes which often cross county lines, and even state and international boundaries.

Nationally, retailers saw a 26.5% increase in the number of reported ORC incidents from 2020 to 2021. And Kansas has an important role to play in catching, investigating, and prosecuting these crimes. According to Buy Safe America, the Sunflower State is one of the top 10 states where organized retail crime hits the hardest.

Our laws must catch up with this new enterprise to protect consumers, who will bear the cost as prices for goods are inflated to make up for retail losses; and to protect customers, store employees, and communities from the violence and aggression that goes hand-in-hand with any criminal enterprise.

In the Kansas Attorney General's office, we are working with our law enforcement and private industry partners to create a Kansas Organized Retail Crime Task Force to examine ways that

will to thwart this new criminal enterprise. This bill, which gives the Attorney General the authority to prosecute any crime that is part of an alleged criminal enterprise that occurs in two or more counties, is a good start. It passed the Senate with an overwhelming, bipartisan majority, 35-3, and I hope the House concludes similarly that this is a necessary tool in combatting organized retail crime. I ask for your support for SB 244.