

RETAIL THEFT — BELMONT

Grievance

MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont) [9.31 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Police. My electorate of Belmont has, like many others, a significant issue with shoplifting, theft and fuel drive-offs, especially from local small businesses. Retailers are at their wits' end from having their goods continually stolen, often by repeat offenders, and there being very little recourse under the law to prosecute the offenders who are shoplifting from their premises or stealing from their customers—stealing handbags, credit cards or purchased items. This has been a particular problem experienced by many shops in the Belmont Forum, shops along Belvidere Street, the Kooyong Road shops and petrol stations and convenience stores around the City of Belmont. A number of local petrol stations have been repetitively targeted by the same shoplifters, and they have expressed to me their frustration that those thieves seem to be unperturbed by being caught as there is very little, if any, repercussion for their actions. This is simply not good enough. Action needs to be taken to tackle this persistent issue in my community. It affects storeowners, many of whom are small business owners and have suffered a financial loss by having their goods stolen, but also have had to outlay significant amounts of money to install expensive security cameras and screens to deter shoplifting or to assist in providing information to police when they have items stolen.

One local small business, a bottle shop, has been targeted by shoplifters and has had to install very expensive equipment as a result of the losses he has incurred from continual theft. This includes internal cameras as well as external cameras around the perimeter of his business, and internal television screens to monitor the store and its entrance. He recently asked me to visit his store to see that equipment and he explained to me how that was having an impact on his business and its viability.

This presents a significant problem also for locals who frequent the Belmont Forum and the other shopping precincts I mentioned earlier, where there are often reports of handbags being stolen, and in the process of the theft people are being pushed over, particularly older people. This causes many in my community to feel unsafe and, in some instances, deters them from shopping in our local area entirely for fear of theft. I know that this is particularly the case for older residents in my community who simply will not go to the shops. They feel too vulnerable and they will ask neighbours or family members to do their shopping for them. People in my community have had enough of this type of crime in our local shopping areas.

Without doubt, the police in Belmont do an exceptional job. They work tirelessly to protect our community. They share the community's frustration at the persistence of theft and shoplifting in our community. I ask the minister: what can be done to hold these shoplifters to account and work towards stamping out this type of theft in my community?

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police) [9.34 am]: I thank the member for Belmont for her grievance today about this most important issue. Unfortunately, in recent years there has been an attitude that shoplifting and fuel drive-offs happen. Commissioner Dawson and I have had many discussions on this topic and we are both firmly of the view that we need to crack down in both of those areas, and we have been doing that over the past year or so; however, there is a lot of catch-up to be done. It is concerning that clearly the attitude of a lot of the people doing the shoplifting and retail theft is that it is only shoplifting. However, it is theft, and as the member for Belmont correctly identified, far too often it also involves a level of violence or assault. The government aims to act on that.

New systems are being introduced with the convenience stores of Australia, which effectively are the big fuel companies and garages. I expect to be able to give further advice on that in the near future. Before I go into some changes that police have made recently in dealing with retail theft, I highlight some of the local operations in the member's area. In recent times in the Cannington district, police have conducted operations Emulate, Verdun and Crevice to target retail theft by juveniles. Rather than ignoring the issue, specialist operations have been set up to target those who are consistently committing retail theft.

Banning notices have been employed at the Waterford Plaza, Belmont Forum and Westfield Carousel Shopping Centre and at Bunnings stores in the Cannington area. Earlier this year a gang specialising in handbag theft and credit card fraud in the Cannington district was disrupted, resulting in a number of arrests. We know that those people do not stop until they are arrested and brought before the court. Police are working with the national retailers association about shopping centres, and positive feedback has been received on some of the changes that police are making to deal with theft.

Retail theft has a significant impact. I acknowledge the impact it has on small business owners and shop assistants throughout the metropolitan area who are subjected to theft on a daily basis. In the past couple of months a directive went out to police throughout the metropolitan area to look at preferring the highest charges possible when retail theft occurs. Retail theft is up this financial year to date compared with the same time last year. This is something that police have monitored closely. Officers across the metropolitan region have been directed for the first time to charge offenders with the more serious offence of robbery in circumstances in which an incident has escalated to

violence. Put simply, simple theft is not an offence that carries an imprisonment term. Robbery with violence has an imprisonment term of up to 20 years; that is very different. I want to put people on notice that the police will not take a soft approach to those who steal from retail premises. Police will look to prefer the highest charges possible because it is plainly unacceptable. Many people are subjected daily to violence when they go to work in their own store or as a shop assistant. If people steal from a shop and assault someone as part of that, they face a sentence of up to 20 years' jail. I hasten to add that it does not mean that everyone will get a sentence of 20 years' jail, but it means that jail time is a very real prospect. People should not think that they can go out and steal with impunity.

Police outlined to me a few recent incidents, one of which occurred in your electorate, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms M.M. Quirk). A robbery occurred at a Girrawheen tavern on 20 October 2018. The accused selected two 10 packs of alcohol. He allegedly pushed them into the chest of the staff member to move him out of the way. The accused was charged and convicted of a robbery, for which he received a two-year imprisonment term from the Perth District Court on 2 August 2019.

Others in progress include an incident in Armadale where three suspects, two female and one male, entered the store and began removing numerous perfume packs from the shelves. One of the female suspects grabbed and pushed a female staff member as she attempted to stop them from leaving the store with property they had not paid for. The two female suspects have both been charged with aggravated robbery. A 16-year-old girl from Armadale will appear in court on 23 October and a 45-year-old woman from Armadale appeared in court on 24 September. I have seen video footage of an incident that occurred at a supermarket in Midland when a man allegedly stole groceries and pushed a shopping trolley into a security guard who was attending other duties and was unable to leave that post. However, the accused man has been identified and charged with robbery and will appear in Perth District Court on 10 December. I will close with the following incident. At a liquor store in Beldon, a male suspect entered the store, picked up a carton of alcohol and walked out without paying and challenged the male staff member. A 39-year-old man from Gosnells has been charged with aggravated robbery and his next court appearance is in November. I want to assure the member for Belmont that police are taking this very seriously. They have been taking a tough, new approach over recent months and that will continue.