# Amid rising crime, campaign rekindled to protect retail workers



**Amid Rising Crime, Campaign Rekindled to Protect Retail Workers**

**Edinburgh, Scotland** - Siobhian Brown MSP, the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, has expressed her support for the renewal of the "Don't Put Up with It!" campaign, a joint effort by the Scottish Grocers' Federation (SGF), the Scottish Government, Crime Stoppers/Fearless, and Police Scotland. Originally launched to address escalating crime against retail workers, this initiative aims to provide exhaustive information and guidance for retailers, highlighting the support available through the Protection of Workers (Retail) Act 2021 and charitable organisations such as Grocery Aid.

The Protection of Workers Act, introduced by Daniel Johnson MSP and endorsed by the Scottish Government, came into effect in August 2021. The legislation seeks to offer enhanced legal protection for retail workers, making it an offence to threaten or abuse them, particularly when they are performing statutory duties like age verification.

Statistics available since the introduction of the Act indicate a worrying increase in the abuse and threatening behaviour faced by retail workers. Up to the end of January 2024, Police Scotland reported 10,295 incidents, including 4,624 assaults on retail staff.

Minister Brown stated, "I fully support the ‘Don’t Put Up with It!’ campaign, which calls for everyone to respect retailers and encourages shop workers to report all incidents of retail crime to Police Scotland. Retail workers provide an invaluable service to all of us, and any kind of abuse or violence is completely unacceptable."

Dr Pete Cheema OBE, SGF's Chief Executive, highlighted the severe impact of these crimes, saying, "It’s more than just shop windows that are being shattered; it’s people’s lives and livelihoods. The trauma can have a serious impact on the wellbeing of the individual, their family, and their community."

Maxine Fraser, Managing Director of RAC, added, "People should not have to go to work in their local community and experience threatening and abusive behaviour on a regular basis, often escalating to violence. It’s simply not acceptable."

The campaign offers various resources, including advice, support for retailers, and downloadable posters available on its official website, aiming to educate the public on the significant impact of retail crime and encouraging the reporting of such incidents.

**Rising Crime and Decreasing Police Presence**

In a broader context, Scotland, particularly its major cities like Glasgow, continues to see a rise in crime amidst a reduction in police numbers. From 2022-23 to 2023-24, the overall number of crimes increased by 4%, moving from 289,362 to 299,780. Violent and sexual offences have become a nightly occurrence, with a serious offence recorded every six minutes on average. The frequency of housebreakings and shoplifting incidents has also dramatically increased.

The decline in visible police presence and the closure of numerous police stations have been matters of public concern. Police Scotland is currently operating with its lowest number of officers since 2008. This reduction has given rise to what is known as a 'proportionate response' strategy, where minor crimes are often not fully investigated.

Issues affecting public confidence in the police are exacerbated by the visible signs of neglect in urban centres. Public urination, open drug use, littering, and extensive graffiti have been flagged as symptoms of a larger problem: a community left to fend for itself without sufficient policing.

Public sentiment reflects growing disillusionment. According to the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, only 39% of adults are aware of regular police patrols in their area, while 49% believe that Police Scotland is doing a good or excellent job, a significant drop from previous years.

Despite these challenges, efforts like the "Don’t Put Up with It!" campaign aim to mitigate some of the adverse effects by focusing on the retail sector, which has been particularly vulnerable to increasing levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

**Future Outlook**

As crime rates continue to rise and public trust in law enforcement wavers, campaigns such as "Don’t Put Up with It!" highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to community safety and crime prevention. There are calls for a balanced strategy that not only addresses the immediate need for better protection of retail workers but also tackles the underlying issues contributing to the broader increase in crime across Scotland.