



WATERTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

David Brower, Chief of Police

To: Public Safety and Welfare Committee

From: Assistant Chief Ben Olsen

Date: Thursday, March 27, 2025

Subject: Update on Police Calls to Walmart and Response Measures

Dear Committee Members,

I would like to bring your attention to a matter raised in a recent article from the *Daily Times* regarding the reported "incident surge" at Walmart, citing an average of 7 calls every 10 days in 2024. The article highlighted this as a significant increase, but it did not provide context by comparing these numbers to previous years, nor was data from 2023 or 2022 provided to allow for a comprehensive analysis or to draw conclusions.

Upon reviewing the relevant data, I can report that while theft-related calls have fluctuated over the past few years, the overall trend for calls to Walmart has been one of decrease. Specifically, there were 78 theft-related calls in 2024, 121 in 2023, and 107 in 2022. Despite these theft-related calls, the total number of police calls to Walmart in 2024 (262 calls) decreased from the previous year (329 calls in 2023). For a more detailed breakdown of calls for service each year, a complete listing is attached to this memo for your review.

In response to the growing concern over theft, the Watertown Police Department has implemented several measures to streamline the response process. Historically, officers would spend considerable time at Walmart waiting for loss prevention staff to gather and prepare necessary evidence, which created inefficiencies. To address this, we have worked closely with Walmart and other major retailers to ensure documentation is prepared in advance, allowing officers to reduce their on-site time and return to more pressing duties.

Additionally, Walmart has been a valuable partner in addressing these challenges. For the past few years, Walmart has funded a Flock Camera at the main exit of their property, which has significantly improved our ability to resolve cases more quickly and efficiently. This camera has been in place for a couple of years now and has helped the police department gather valuable evidence, leading to faster resolutions of theft-related incidents and enhancing public safety.

While theft—especially with the rise of self-checkout kiosks—continues to be a challenge for Walmart, the department is actively exploring new solutions to mitigate its impact on both Walmart and the police department.

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It's important to note that while these calls to Walmart are notable, they are not outside the scope of what can be expected given the high volume of business conducted at the store. If the Public Safety & Welfare Committee feels that further measures should be taken to manage Walmart's use of department resources more effectively, we could consider potential policy changes or new procedures. For example, similar to how we handle low-level crimes like bad checks, we may be able to set thresholds that trigger an investigation only when certain criteria are met, such as a minimum threshold of loss.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Ben Olsen
Assistant Chief