



NYC socialist says the "true crime" is stopping shoplifters

A New York City socialist lawmaker is defending people who steal basic goods from stores, arguing that shoplifting driven by what she called a “biological need” should not result in someone being thrown behind bars.

State Assemblywoman Emily Gallagher, a Brooklyn Democrat who describes herself as a “neighborhood organizer” and “democratic socialist,” made the [remarks](#) Thursday outside Manhattan Criminal Court while appearing with members of Court Watch NYC.

The organization said its members observed hundreds of arraignments over several days and found that roughly half involved misdemeanor charges.

Gallagher used those cases to argue that much of what passes through the criminal justice system amounts to “crimes of poverty,” pointing specifically to thefts involving everyday products such as toothpaste and soap.

“Most of what we saw were crimes of poverty — people who are stealing things like toothpaste, people who were stealing things like, you know, soap,” Gallagher said. “And that means if you’re stealing those things, you need them.”

She then suggested the greater injustice was protecting major retailers such as CVS and Walgreens rather than people struggling financially.

“So I would say that the true crime is that there is such incredible wealth disparity in this city that there are people who can be thrown in jail simply for having a biological need,” Gallagher said.

Gallagher also defended New York’s criminal justice policies and said she is working to pass measures such as “treatment not jail.” She accused conservative media outlets of attempting to roll back reforms by “fear mongering” about defendants she described as being in desperate circumstances.

The argument immediately drew criticism online from people who noted that shoplifting carries consequences well beyond the balance sheets of large corporations.

“The entire foundation for a civilized society rests on private property, ownership, and not stealing,” one social media user [wrote](#) according to Breitbart. “If you legalized stealing, society would literally crumble overnight.”

Another commenter offered a more practical rebuttal, saying rampant theft had already helped drive a neighborhood pharmacy out of business, costing employees their jobs and leaving elderly residents without a nearby place to fill prescriptions.

The commenter recalled watching one man empty a CVS of toothbrushes and toothpaste, arguing the volume made clear the products were being taken for resale rather than personal necessity.

“He wasn’t doing that for his oral health,” the user wrote.

Gallagher’s remarks come as Republicans increasingly warn that socialist ideas once confined to the political fringe are gaining a foothold among younger voters.

Reps. Claudia Tenney (R-NY) and Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) recently warned about socialism’s growing appeal as the November midterms approach.

Malliotakis argued that socialist systems rarely arrive all at once, but instead advance through incremental government intervention, including price controls, rationing and restrictions on individual liberty.

“It is sort of the baby steps where they begin to implement changes,” Malliotakis said. “They begin to take away freedoms.”

Tenney pointed to her own experience in Yugoslavia during the 1980s, recalling shortages and empty store shelves under the socialist system.

“There wasn’t anything on the shelves,” Tenney said. “I mean, you had to wait in line for bread, and everybody just figured that was part of it.”

Gallagher’s defense of shoplifting offers a considerably more immediate glimpse at the same ideological divide: whether private property remains a basic rule of civil society, or whether someone’s claimed need for what is sitting on a store shelf can outweigh the rights of the person or business that owns it.