

## OPINION 17

# Our retail workers deserve far better

**Paul Nicolaou**



**S**ydney, we've lost the plot if workplace protection orders are needed to shield retail workers from abuse and violence. Unfortunately, that's where we are and why we all need to stand up for people who just want to earn a living.

It is why Business Sydney is backing The Daily Telegraph's Stop Shop Abuse campaign, which is, sadly, so badly needed.

And it's why we are supporting NSW Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety Sophie Cotsis as she looks at new protections for retail workers.

The minister has revealed 25 offenders are already behind bars in NSW for violent abuse of retail workers. But the minister acknowledges that even more needs to be done and that could come in the form of workplace protection orders.

It's staggering to think we would ever need such orders to protect retail workers from the minority of customers who can make their life hell.

These orders are already in place in the ACT, and similar protection is available to commonwealth public servants.

Sophie Cotsis and Premier Chris Minns are particularly concerned about the impact of retail bullies on younger employees.

Many Sydney teenagers have their first experience of working life in the retail sector.

The minister can relate to this – she began her career as a 14-year-old in a shop.

"Thousands of people have worked in retail as their first taste of working," she told Business Sydney. "Having young people assaulted, intimidated or yelled at is not a good experience of their first working life. We want to support all people in retail."

Once introduced, workplace protection orders would be the equivalent of apprehended violence orders.

In the retail setting, customers subject to a workplace protection order would be banned from entering the declared retail premises.

As a society, we need to change the environment. We must reject the notion that retail workers are fair game. They're not.

The retail sector has long been the beating heart of our wonderful city, from corner stores to major shopping centres.

Let's all work together to stop the rot and stamp out the abuse. It's unacceptable and we've had enough.

**Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney**