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NEWS RELEASE

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Ramsey County Attorney, police leaders announce plans to reduce non-public-safety traffic stops

*Law enforcement partners seek to change longstanding practice to build trust
with communities of color, focus resources on public safety*

Saint Paul, MN – Ramsey County Attorney John Choi joined with law enforcement officials today to announce their collective commitment to change longstanding practices in the justice system in which drivers are pulled over solely for non-public-safety reasons, asked to search their vehicle without reasonable suspicion, and prosecuted as a result. Non-public-safety stops occur when a person is pulled over for a minor infraction (such as an equipment violation) while law enforcement seeks evidence of a more serious crime. Drivers of color, and those who are under-resourced who may not be able to afford to make needed repairs, are disproportionately subject to such stops, eroding trust and confidence in the justice system, and among law enforcement and the communities they serve.

“As leaders in the justice system, we must step forward and fundamentally change a long-standing systemic injustice that has impacted generations of people in our community and across this country,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “Recognizing the role we play as prosecutors in perpetuating racial inequities that often result from these types of stops is an important first step in charting a new, less harmful course. I want to thank those in law enforcement across Ramsey County who recognize both the significance and importance of this shift in how we interact with our community.”

"Our data show that most traffic stops occur in areas of the city experiencing higher levels of crime, which also happen to be home to our most diverse populations and many people living below the poverty level. The last thing we want to do is add undue hardship to people struggling to make ends meet. Together, we've embraced a clarion call to focus on the most dangerous driving behaviors while minimizing the disparate impacts of some low-level equipment-related traffic stops." – Saint Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell

“One of the top priorities of the Roseville Police Department is to ensure traffic enforcement serves public safety by focusing on driving conduct that contributes to motor vehicle collisions. As a result, since 2017, over 80% of traffic stops in Roseville have been for moving violations.

The Roseville Police Department supports the Ramsey County Attorney’s prosecution policy on non-public-safety traffic stops. Absent other factors, the Roseville Police Department will not enforce equipment violations, expired registrations, or other non-moving violations that do not create a public safety concern or a dangerous condition.” – Roseville Police Chief Erika Scheider

[Local](#) and [national](#) studies show that non-public-safety traffic stops reflect racial bias, as police stop, question, and search people of color at [higher rates](#) than white people. In addition, these stops do not improve public safety, as the majority [do not result](#) in the discovery of contraband or weapons. When prosecutors condone non-public-safety stops, they encourage police officers to focus on people, rather than actions they deem ‘suspicious.’ In addition, we know that there is a safety risk for our officers and our community residents during traffic stops, so by eliminating unnecessary non-public-safety stops, we are increasing safety for our officers and our community members, alike.

Policies regarding non-public-safety traffic stops

The chiefs of the Saint Paul and Roseville police departments issued policies directing their officers to minimize non-public-safety stops and focus their efforts instead on conduct most threatening to the public’s safety, such as speeding, distracted driving, driving under the influence, etc. The Ramsey County Attorney issued a policy, effective today, that states that the office will no longer prosecute cases based solely on a non-public-safety traffic stop or those that are the result of a vehicle search based solely on consent, without any other articulable suspicion. Other local chiefs quoted on the attached list expressed support for these policies and practice alignment or plans for local process to advance these efforts.

The announced policies do not apply to situations that endanger public safety or when a vehicle is stopped due to a dangerous condition. A dangerous condition exists when an improper or malfunctioning piece of motor vehicle equipment creates a substantial, articulable, and identifiable risk of injury to any person.

Philanthropic partners enhance efforts to develop alternative responses, measure results

Justice system partners are committed to collaborating with our community to develop alternative responses to address non-public-safety violations. This could include a way for officers to report violations they observe back to a centralized system that could notify vehicle owners via mail and perhaps offer assistance in getting necessary repairs made for those who can least afford it. To jumpstart this effort, the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation raised seed money in partnership with other local philanthropic organizations to create an alternative response fund to enable: data transparency and evaluation, developing alternative responses, and financially assisting those from under-resourced communities to make repairs.

“Traffic stops for things that pose no community threat, and which too often can lead to traumatic outcomes, impede our community’s ability to thrive, said Eric Jolly, president and CEO of the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation. “This is not just a solution for Ramsey County and Minnesota, I believe this is a solution that can be replicated across the country.”

This effort has been bolstered thanks to strategic engagement with national partners, including the [W. Haywood Burns Institute](#) on dismantling structural racism in the administration of justice

and the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) and [Institute for Innovation in Prosecution's Motion for Justice](#) initiative, which is focused on centering racial equity in prosecution reform.

“It is long past time that minor infractions such as these be dealt with through means other than a stress-inducing interaction on the side of the road,” said Ramsey County Board Chair Toni Carter. “They have caused unnecessary trauma and disparities for people and neighborhoods of color who for generations have had to “have the talk” with our children about surviving these incidents. They breed distrust, and they hamper and thwart the efforts of law enforcement to build, repair and improve relationships that are critical for serving and protecting all.”

Additional Information

1. A list of quotes from local law enforcement officials accompanies this press release.
2. A copy of the new RCAO policy along with related resources and a fact sheet can be found on the [RCAO News & Updates](#) page.

Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.