

OFFICE OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY  
John J. Choi, County Attorney



---

345 Wabasha Street, Suite 120, St. Paul, MN 55102-1432  
Telephone 651-266-3222 Fax 651-266-3015

## NEWS RELEASE

June 7, 2023

Contact: Dennis Gerhardstein, 651 266-3074  
(Cell) 651 600-1830

### **Ramsey County reduction of non-public-safety traffic stops and policy goals affirmed by independent research results; alternative to stops deployed**

*Ramsey County Attorney, law enforcement partners announced changed policies and practices to reduce non-public-safety traffic stops in September of 2021*

Saint Paul, MN – In September of 2021 Ramsey County law enforcement leaders announced they would reduce reliance on non-public-safety traffic stops (stops for things like one taillight out or something hanging from a rear-view mirror). Their goal was to improve the quality of justice and safety by focusing resources on situations that are most likely to present a public safety threat, improving community trust, reducing racial inequities, and providing an alternative to equipment violation enforcement.

Today, Ramsey County Attorney John Choi convened law enforcement and community leaders from across Ramsey County to announce independent research results that affirm progress toward these goals. The research showed that non-public-safety related traffic stops greatly decreased, moving violations increased as a percentage of all traffic stops, and that racial disparities for these stops were reduced by almost half and for related searches by more than half. Also announced was the successful deployment of a program to, in place of the non-public-safety stops, send letters to the vehicle owner and offer financial assistance making repairs or renewing vehicle registration.

“This independent research shows we not only greatly reduced the unequal treatment of many in our community due to these stops, but also that law enforcement has been able to move scarce resources to more serious issues,” said **Ramsey County Attorney John Choi**. “At the same time police-community relations are being strengthened through the alternative notice letter and financial assistance program we’ve developed. I’m grateful to all of our partners in this work, particularly all the police chiefs who have provided leadership in trying new approaches to both build community trust and improve public safety.”

“These changes allow our officers to focus their time on driving conduct that impacts the safety of our roadways,” said **Roseville Police Chief Erika Scheider**. “Ultimately, we decided to try a different approach with addressing minor equipment violations.”

“When members of the public believe their law enforcement organizations represent them, understand them, and respond to them, and when communities perceive authorities as fair, legitimate, and accountable, it deepens trust in law enforcement,” said **Maplewood Police Chief Brian Bierdeman**. “This trust is essential to defusing tension, solving crimes, and creating a system in which residents view law enforcement as both fair and just. “

“Listening to our community matters. The Saint Paul Police Department formed the Traffic Stop Working Group in 2021 to review traffic safety and enforcement in Saint Paul. These community discussions directed our attention to moving violations that affect people on our roadways. This resulted in a directive to our officers to focus on driving behaviors that most likely lead to crashes, injury, and possibly death. Traffic safety is more important to us than traffic stops.”

- **Saint Paul Police Chief Axel Henry**

“These changes may not be well known at this time to many in the African American community, but they are some of the most important changes to be made in decades. I believe lives will literally be saved.”

- **Tyrone Terrill, President, African American Leadership Council**

“Across the country, police stop more than 20 million motorists a year for alleged traffic violations. Nearly half of these stops are for minor violations that do not affect public safety. Traffic stops that do not impact public safety undermine trust and cause harms that are not equally felt: Black drivers in Ramsey County were four times more likely to be stopped, and nine times more likely to be searched, than white drivers for these minor violations. These changes in Ramsey County have resulted in 66 percent fewer traffic stops of Black motorists, while increasing police availability for violations that impact public safety like reckless driving, marking a crucial step forward in reducing racial disparities and building trust with communities.”

- **Akhi Johnson, Director, Reshaping Prosecution Initiative at Vera Institute for Justice**, which provided technical assistance to the County Attorney’s Office.

## **More About the Research**

In April 2022, [Justice Innovation Lab](#) (JIL) began its partnership with RCAO to help them understand the impact of this policy change. Overall, the data analyses indicate that the new traffic stop policy was successful in reducing minor, non-safety-related vehicle violation stops, that this reduction resulted in a narrowing of racial differences in traffic stops and searches, and that the policy had no discernible effect on public safety.

“Policies like this show how a data-informed, collaborative problem-solving approach can improve law enforcement performance and achieve more equitable outcomes, without negatively impacting public safety,” said **Jared Fishman, Founding Executive Director of Justice Innovation Lab**. “Ramsey County is leading the way in taking a more thoughtful approach to building a more effective and fair public safety system.”

- Non-public-safety traffic stops, and searches declined significantly for policy-aligned police departments. Stops went down by 86% and searches by 92%.
- Non-public-safety traffic stops by policy-aligned departments decreased from 25% to 5% of all traffic stops.
- Black drivers in Ramsey County experienced the largest decrease in non-public-safety traffic stops per capita, down 66% the year after the change.
- The changes had no discernible effect on crime rates.

### **Alternatives and Community Support**

The paradigm shifts for how law enforcement agencies handle equipment violation stops does not leave vehicle owners unaware of the identified problem. An alternative system is now in place for all officers in Ramsey County to quickly generate a report on their squad computer that can then be used to generate a letter to the vehicle's owner, notifying them of the date and nature of the violation.

If the vehicle owner needs assistance in paying for the taillight, for example, a note is included in each communication about the availability of assistance through the [Lights On!](#) repair coupon program, or through [Diversion Solutions](#) for vehicle registration renewal assistance. The financial assistance is provided through a partnership with the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation. Since May of 2022, Saint Paul and Roseville have issued a combined 2,000 letters and provided over 60 Lights On! coupons. Several other police departments in Ramsey County plan to join the program.

“Making our communities safer takes the creativity and ingenuity of all sectors, including philanthropy. We now see concrete evidence that simple actions, such as notifying people that they have a broken taillight, and offering them assistance to get the lights fixed, can influence different outcomes. And, in some cases, these new outcomes may ultimately mean the difference between life and death. I am proud that the Foundation is a partner in this critical initiative.”

- **Eric Jolly, Ph.D., President and CEO of the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation**

---

Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.