



## Ramsey County Sheriff's Office

Bob Fletcher, Sheriff

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### Office of the Sheriff

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March 6, 2023

Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo  
Commissioner Nicole Joy Frethem  
Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire  
Commissioner Rena Moran  
Ramsey County Courthouse  
15 West Kellogg Boulevard, Suite 220  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

Commissioner Rafael Ortega  
Commissioner Mai Chong Xiong  
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for your discussion regarding crime during last Tuesday's County Board meeting. Obviously, reducing juvenile delinquency requires a multi-pronged approach that combines prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategies. Cooperation, coordination, and contributions from many different agencies are essential for any real progress.

As you correctly pointed out, "upstream" prevention and intervention programs are critically important to our community's long-term success. Early childhood education, anti-poverty assistance, opportunities to secure stable housing, access to health care, mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatments, and other strategies can give our young people a chance for a brighter future and provide much needed relief for residents of our crime-weary county.

One of the most critical pieces of our overall crime reduction strategy must be family economic stability. Employment opportunities are essential, of course, but there are many other ways that government can contribute to that stability, such as providing timely financial assistance to families in economic stress.

During my travels this winter, I encountered residents worried about how they were going to pay their bills and put food on the table for their children. They needed help and applied for financial assistance with Ramsey County — but had received no response. They told me they were struggling every day, and their application for assistance went unanswered by Ramsey County.

Clearly, financial stress can be a contributing factor in theft-related crime. In fact, most crime is economic in nature.

Concerned about the economic stress families were experiencing and being unfamiliar with the county's process, I began researching their concerns.



To my surprise, I learned that for over a year the Financial Assistance Services (Human Services) Department has been behind in processing applications for assistance. As you know, the county receives and processes applications for food, cash, health care, child care, and emergencies. On January 17, 2023, there were over 7,000 applications waiting to be processed by Ramsey County. Applications for financial assistance were not even being looked at for seven weeks.

On January 18, 2023, I met with County Board Chair Trista MatasCastillo to discuss several items and shared my concerns about the county's slow response to families' pleas for help. She stated that the delay was even worse than I knew, and that people were actually waiting 12 weeks before receiving benefits. Chair MatasCastillo also said she was very concerned about the delay and had directed County Manager Ryan O'Connor to make "getting caught up" a top priority.

On February 2, 2023, I met with County Manager Ryan O'Connor. We discussed several issues, including the delay in processing requests for county assistance to many of our most vulnerable residents. I told him that this delay likely means 30,000 children in Ramsey County are unable to get assistance for food and other essential items. County Manager O'Connor blamed the State of Minnesota.

After our meeting, the county created a "dashboard" on their website, finally disclosing the backlog of applications for assistance. That information can be found online at <https://data.ramseycounty.us/stories/s/Financial-Assistance-Services-Dashboard/nbjb-awzh>. As of the time of this letter, there still remains a backlog of 5,809 applications waiting to be processed. While there has been improvement during the past six weeks, we are still faced with a situation resulting in thousands of children experiencing food insecurity and other financial hardships.

According to Human Services employees, there are other issues of concern regarding six month long delays in the county processing of "waivers" for assistance so that elderly persons may stay in their home while receiving care, but for the purpose of this letter, I would like to focus on the impact that a two month delay can have on the financial stress of a family.

Timely and reliable financial assistance for food and other benefits is one of the most important "upstream" crime prevention efforts that Ramsey County can provide. It is my hope that the county board can ensure this delay is remedied as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Fletcher".

Bob Fletcher  
Ramsey County Sheriff