

# Stop Gap

UNDERSTANDING DATA COLLECTION  
ON TRAFFIC STOPS IN MINNESOTA



*A Citizens League Report*



*“The safety of the people shall be the highest law.”*

– Marcus Tullius Cicero

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*“Data is a precious thing and will last longer  
than the systems themselves.”*

– Tim Berners-Lee

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# Introduction

Being pulled over by law enforcement while driving a vehicle can elicit a number of emotions – perhaps the driver knows immediately that they were caught speeding, running a red light, or operating a cell phone while driving. Other times, drivers are understandably nervous or unsure – did they forget to use a turn signal? Is a tail light out? And for many drivers, larger sociocultural questions and worries come into play – are they being pulled over because of their perceived race, ethnicity or age? Does their vehicle or do their physical characteristics match a description of something or someone else involved in a crime? Will the officer be able to understand them if, for example, English is not their primary language?

In all of these instances, data – about why the driver is being pulled over, what they’ve done wrong or need to correct, and what any associated penalty or consequence may be – is critical information for both the law enforcement officer and the driver. Data supports clear communication and mutual understanding of the situation and how to rectify it.

As of 2024, Minnesota Statute<sup>1</sup> specifies that peace officers conducting a traffic stop must not *ask* the driver of a vehicle if they can identify why they were pulled over and, rather, must *inform* the driver of the vehicle why they were pulled over (unless there are extenuating circumstances).<sup>2</sup> The initial reason for a traffic stop may or may not differ from an actual or eventual charge, ticket, or arrest.

Hundreds of thousands of traffic stops occur across Minnesota each year and are initiated for all kinds of reasons.<sup>3</sup> This research and report have sought to more deeply understand:

1. If and how data is collected on the *initial* reasoning for traffic stops,
2. How and where law enforcement publicly uses or reports that data, and
3. What challenges and opportunities exist in Minnesota to establish more transparency and access to traffic stop data for analysis and policy.

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<sup>1</sup> 169.905 *Traffic Stop; Questioning Limited*. 2025 Minnesota Statutes (2025). Minnesota Legislature - Office of the Revisor of Statutes.

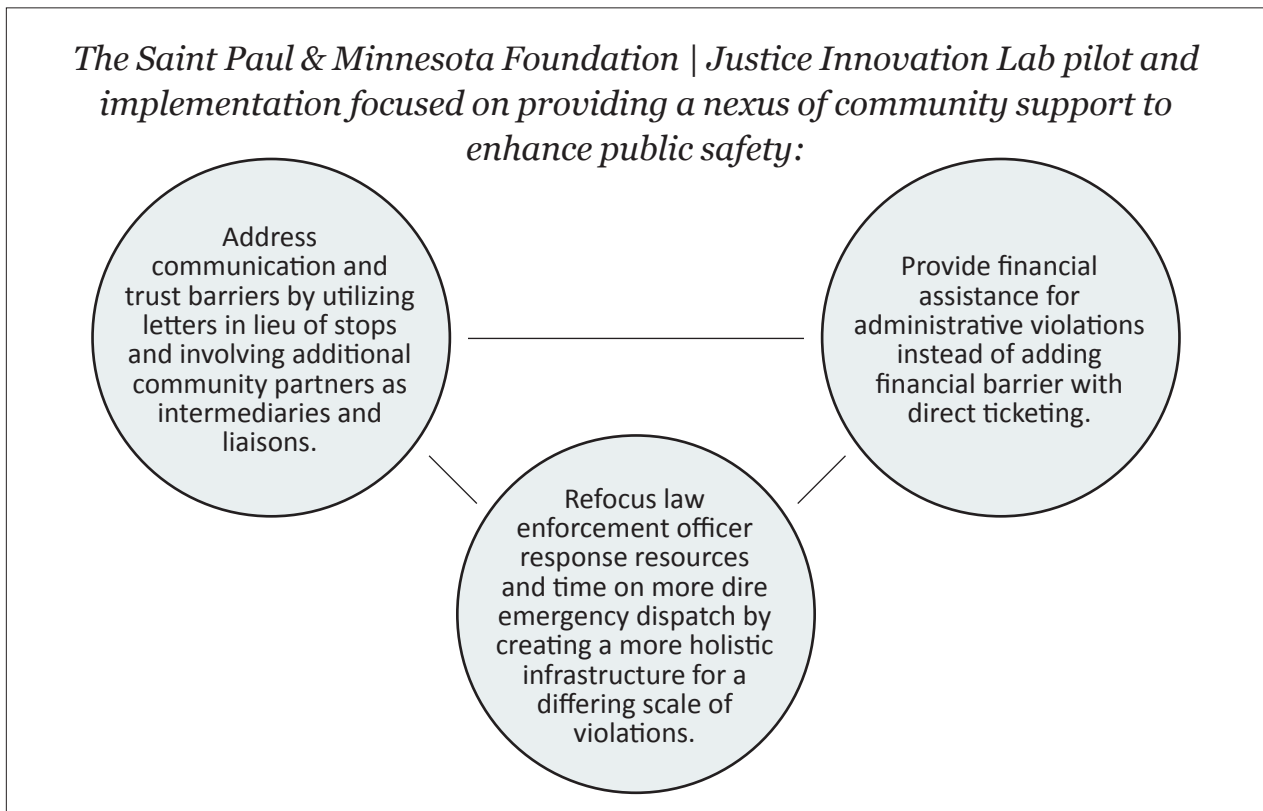
<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim, M. *Minnesota police can no longer ask why a driver thinks they’ve been pulled over* (2024, June 7). MinnPost.

<sup>3</sup> *Traffic safety snapshot dashboard* (2025). Minnesota Department of Public Safety - State Patrol.

# Project Overview

In 2021, Ramsey County and affiliated municipal law enforcement agencies announced a pilot program to reduce reliance on traffic stops that were not moving violations, with a goal of decreasing drastic racial disparities in traffic stops. The Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation<sup>4</sup> partnered with the county to support alternative methods for addressing administrative and equipment violations in the community. Examples included sending letters to vehicle owners instead of conducting traffic stops and implementing financial and logistical assistance to remedy issues like expired tabs.

The 2021-2022 pilot was studied by Justice Innovation Lab, a national justice research organization, which found that large disparities in non-moving-violation traffic stops based on race significantly decreased in Ramsey County.<sup>5</sup> The pilot program conducted by Ramsey County and municipal partners resulted in an 86% reduction in non-public-safety traffic stops, a 66% reduction in non-public-safety traffic stops for Black drivers specifically, and an overall decrease in non-moving-violation traffic stops from 25% to 5%. Ultimately, several participating entities adopted some or all of the piloted practices as permanent policy.



<sup>4</sup> *New Initiative Strives to Advance Equity and Increase Safety and Community Trust* (2022). Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> *Ending non-public-safety traffic stops in Ramsey County, MN* (2024, March 19). Justice Innovation Lab.

The data and outcomes from the Ramsey County pilot process led to continued conversation and a secondary inquiry, building on the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation’s values of learning, equity, innovation, and community-led solutions: **how can data support good governance for public safety?** Citizens League, a trusted, nonpartisan nonprofit organization that focuses on civic engagement and public policy, was brought on board to examine data collection on traffic stops in the state of Minnesota, with generous support from the Foundation for the project.

Broadly, this project has sought to more deeply understand what information on traffic stops is being collected by law enforcement agencies statewide. More specifically, the project examined whether agencies record data for the **initial reason for a traffic stop** that is **not a moving violation** and, if so, what data is collected and how. This information was compiled to see if there are opportunities for policy innovation that could create more efficacy, efficiency, or equitable outcomes.

## Data Details

### **18 meetings / conversations**

- 10 representative of Seven-County Metro area
- 6 representative of Greater Minnesota and statewide work
- 2 representative of national perspective

### **55 law enforcement jurisdictions represented in analysis of existing public data**

- 25 representative of Seven-County Metro area
- 30 representative of Greater Minnesota

## Methods

This research project was put together as a primarily *qualitative* endeavor to better understand the following questions:

- Are there requirements for data collection on traffic stops in Minnesota?
- What data is collected on traffic stops in Minnesota by law enforcement officers and agencies?
- How do law enforcement officers and agencies collect and/or report data on the initial reasons for traffic stops?
- Is there need, space, opportunity, or interest in exploring policy innovations or alternatives for data collection and for traffic stops, particularly for “secondary” equipment offenses or non-moving violations? What are some of those options or opportunities?

In service of these questions, the Citizens League team reviewed literature and statute; analyzed public data and existing research; and conducted a series of conversations, meetings, and interviews with law enforcement officers and leaders, community safety professionals and practitioners, organizers, researchers, nonprofit leaders and other stakeholders representing Minnesota jurisdictions and national perspectives.

The findings in this report are intended to be supplementary to numerous other resources supporting efforts to advance public safety in Minnesota.

## How This Report Is Organized

This research project was a broad exploratory inquiry. In lieu of specific recommendations, this report identifies considerations at the intersection of traffic stops, data, policing, and public and community safety.

In the pages that follow, you will find:

- Clarifying **background information and contextual language**
- **Key considerations** that arose through the research process, each including **challenges and opportunities** specific to that topic
- **Themes** that arose in the research to keep top-of-mind for future collaboration and action
- **Resources** for further learning and continued conversation

Quotation throughout this report is anonymous– quotes and examples represent perspectives from a range of governance structures, roles, and circumstances around the state.

About the project partners:

***The Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation*** partners with donors, nonprofit organizations and community members to meet the aspiration of an equitable, just and vibrant Minnesota where all people and communities thrive.

***Citizens League*** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that empowers people to engage in civic life and public policy to make Minnesota a better place to live and work for everyone.

# Background

Police pull over more than 50,000 people in a day in the United States,<sup>6</sup> and traffic stops are considered the most common interaction between the public and law enforcement. However, there is no systemic way to track data about traffic stops, in our state or nationally.

Some believe that eliminating traffic stops for low-level offenses (such as expired tabs or not wearing a seatbelt) can improve public safety, and many municipalities have enacted such policies. The reality of bias – particularly racial bias – in traffic stops has been supported by data, bolstering further advocacy for data tracking and transparency as well as for traffic stop reforms.

Most law enforcement agencies cite public safety as the primary goal and outcome for traffic stops (moving and non-moving-violations alike), maintaining that non-moving-violation stops prevent more dangerous activity and future violations impacting broader public safety.

There is ample Supreme Court precedence for traffic stop allowance, probable cause, reasonable suspicion, and pretextual stops, notably in *Carroll v. United States* (1925) and *Whren v. United States* (1996).<sup>7</sup> However, traffic stop permissibility for law enforcement must also be balanced with the 4th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects civilians from unreasonable searches and seizures.

Though data is generally collected and publicly available from different sources on the *outcomes* of traffic stops (such as searches, arrests, or citations), there is much less readily available information or public data on the *initial purpose* for the traffic stop, and how often the initial reason for a stop may differ from the eventual outcome.

Accurate and timely data is key to public discourse about traffic stops. With the right information about statewide stops (and the right tools to obtain it), our collective understanding and reflection will improve, as can future public safety outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> *Findings* (2023). The Stanford Open Policing Project.

<sup>7</sup> *Traffic stops in the United States* (2025). Research Starters | EBSCO Research.

# Understanding Terminology

## *What is a traffic stop? What are the different types of traffic stops?*

Duties and limitations related to driving and traffic, including licensing, instructions for when to stop and signal, vehicle size and weight limitations, and license plate restrictions are all established by state law. Violations are enforced as infractions via jurisdictional law enforcement.<sup>8</sup>

A **traffic stop** is a violation observed by an officer, justified by probable cause, which results in a driver or vehicle stop. “Traffic stops” can also include bicycle stops and pedestrian stops.

Generally, and for the purposes of this report, traffic stops can be understood as happening for two types of offenses:<sup>9</sup>

- **Moving violations** [*might also be called **public-safety stops, stops in the interest of public safety***] include activities that endanger the safety of the general public such as speeding, running stoplights or stop signs, driving under the influence, and distracted driving.
- **Non-moving violations** [*might also be called **non-public-safety stops, secondary offenses, or low-level traffic offenses, and include equipment violations***] include activities which are generally considered less severe or not posing an imminent threat to public safety, such as a vehicle light being out or broken, objects hanging from mirrors, covered tags, noncompliant window tints, etc.<sup>10</sup>
  - Conditions such as expired auto registration tabs are technically considered **administrative violations**, not equipment violations. Some agencies include administrative and equipment violations under the umbrella category of non-moving-violations when collecting or releasing data on traffic stops. Some law enforcement officers we spoke with emphasized that they do not like to use ‘non-public-safety’ language to refer to non-moving-violations, because they do not want to communicate that those stops do not have public safety implications.

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<sup>8</sup> Burress, M., & Johnson, B. *Traffic Citations* (2019). Minnesota Legislature - House Research.

<sup>9</sup> *Traffic Stops* (n.d.). City of Saint Peter.

<sup>10</sup> *Charging Policy Regarding Non-Public-Safety Traffic Stops* (2021, September 8). Office of the Ramsey County Attorney | John J. Choi.

## ***What can be used by law enforcement to pull someone over?***

To protect the constitutional rights of motorists, passengers, cyclists, and pedestrians, traffic stops are to be reasonably justified and based on a level of proof. Law enforcement officers are trained with several backups to warrant a traffic stop:<sup>11</sup>

- **Reasonable suspicion** is an officer having articulable facts to support a reasonable belief that the vehicle is involved in criminal activity that may be happening.
- **Probable cause** is an officer's sufficient belief that a vehicle contains evidence of a crime or contraband, or that the driver has committed a crime.
- **Pretextual traffic stops** are stops for traffic violations with the purpose of investigating for evidence of another crime.<sup>12</sup> Non-moving violation stops may be used as **pretext** to search a vehicle or begin a conversation.<sup>13</sup> Pretextual traffic stops are protected by legal precedent,<sup>14</sup> however if no evidence to support probable cause or reasonable justification is clear, continued search and seizure is prohibited. Opposition to pretextual stops has heightened due to data on racial disparities in policing and increased understanding about racial and cultural biases.

## ***Who can initiate a traffic stop?***

Traffic stops can generally be initiated and conducted by a peace officer who is on duty and within jurisdiction. In Minnesota state law, there are some cases in which a peace officer's jurisdictional duties extend beyond their own areas, and some cases when traffic stops out of jurisdiction occur (eg. if a vehicle is pursued out of jurisdiction lines but the violation or initial reason for stop began *within* jurisdiction or if there is allowable pretext or probable cause).

A **peace officer** is defined in state statute as “an employee or an elected or appointed official of a political subdivision or law enforcement agency who is licensed [by the Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training], charged with the prevention and detection of crime and the enforcement of the general criminal laws of the state and who has the full power of arrest.” This also includes peace officers employed by a law enforcement agency of a federally recognized tribe, members of State Patrol, and other special and state agents.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 23.3 *Traffic Stops*. (2023, November 6). Metropolitan Police Department - Washington, DC.

<sup>12</sup> *Pretextual Traffic Stops 101: A Complete Guide* (2023, June 7). Law Office of Jordan Marsh.

<sup>13</sup> *An Act to Curtail Pretextual Traffic Stops* (n.d.). Policing Project - NYU School of Law.

<sup>14</sup> *Pretext Traffic Stops: Whren v. United States* (n.d.). Office of Justice Programs.

<sup>15</sup> *Chapter 35 - H.F. No.2432 - MN Laws* (2025). Minnesota Legislature - Office of the Revisor of Statutes.

A **police officer** is a peace officer that has a more local jurisdiction (city, county, township, etc.) and a focus on enforcement, including enforcement of traffic laws to ensure road safety. All police officers are peace officers, but not all peace officers are police officers.<sup>16</sup>

Traffic stops might be most typically encountered by the public with police officers or state patrol agents/troopers.<sup>17</sup>

### ***How is data collected on traffic stops?***

Although the collection and publication of traffic stop data is not required in Minnesota, agencies that voluntarily collect traffic stop data do so through their existing technological platforms.

- A **Computer-Aided Dispatch (“CAD”) System** is the integrated platform used by first responders to prioritize and locate incident calls, to dispatch responders, to log data, and to interface with multiple agencies.<sup>18</sup> CAD Systems often include integrated mapping tools.
- A **Records Management System (“RMS”)** is an agency-wide system used to store, archive, and map information and records related to law enforcement activity. It is not typically used for day-to-day business functions of law enforcement such as payroll or human resources, but rather is the mainstay for data related to enforcement operations from time of entry onward, including citations, warrants, arrests, contact information, etc.<sup>19</sup>
- Combined databases or references to an agency’s full protocol may be referred to as a **“CAD-RMS”** or **“CAD/RMS”**.

Some of the more well known systems are ArcGIS Open Data, Tyler Technologies, Central Square, ProPhoenix, Motorola, Shield, and others. Not all agencies use the same systems, and some jurisdictions share a combined platform, which is a detail important to note for proposed policy changes or data requirements.

The ways in which traffic stops are referenced may vary, so it is important to keep in mind that a mix of the aforementioned terminology (as well as other words or phrases) may be used when discussing relevant actions, policies, or proposals.

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<sup>16</sup> *Difference Between Peace Officers and Police Officers: What You Should Know* (2024, December 22). The Law Enforcement Talk Radio Show and Podcast - Medium.

<sup>17</sup> *About the State Patrol* (2025). Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

<sup>18</sup> *Computer Aided Dispatch Systems* (2011). SAVER TechNote. U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>19</sup> *Standard Functional Specifications for Law Enforcement Records Management Systems (RMS)* (2003). Law Enforcement Information Technology Standards Council (LEITSC). U.S. Department of Justice.

## National Data

Traffic stop data is not systematically tracked on a nationwide level via any federal government agency or organization. Some state and local law enforcement agencies report information about their traffic stops, and more detailed compiling and analysis is done by nonprofit and research organizations, and some agencies.<sup>20</sup>

23 states and the District of Columbia have laws regarding data collection on traffic stops,<sup>21</sup> with varying requirements and specificity around what is tracked and how and where data is released, published, and made available to the public.<sup>22</sup>

Some, but not all, of the policies are specifically tied to racial equity outcomes.

As of this writing, the jurisdictions with legislation requiring some form of data collection on stops include:<sup>23</sup>

- Alabama
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Illinois
- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- North Carolina
- Oregon
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- Texas
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington

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<sup>20</sup> *Traffic stops in the United States (2025)*. Research Starters | EBSCO Research.

<sup>21</sup> *Traffic Stop Data (2021, January 12)*. National Conference of State Legislatures.

<sup>22</sup> *Collecting, Analyzing and Responding to Stop Data: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies, Government, and Communities (2020)*. Center for Policing Equity and Policing Project – NYU School of Law.

<sup>23</sup> *Power BI Report (n.d.)* National Conference of State Legislatures.

## Minnesota Data

As of 2025<sup>24</sup> the Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training reports that Minnesota has 400 law enforcement agencies, including Municipal Police Departments, Tribal Police Departments, Sheriffs' Offices, Specialty Law Enforcement Agencies, and State Agencies. These law enforcement agencies range in size from 20 agencies that employ just one officer to at least 17 agencies that employ more than one hundred officers. In total, there are 10,669 licensed and active peace officers in the state.

In Minnesota, there is no centralized statewide repository or database for traffic stop data, nor is there a statutory requirement or reporting structure for routine or specified data collection on traffic stops. Minnesota also does not currently have a centralized database for citation data – a specialized data request process is required through the court system or the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Law enforcement agencies keep their own records on activity, and these records vary based on data systems used, capacity, and community context.

Many jurisdictions do not make traffic stop data publicly available or indicate that it is collected, but 24% of sampled statewide jurisdictions in our research publish their data online in some capacity. Some others are preparing data to publish or working on implementing traffic stop data collection.

If traffic stop data is collected, it is considered public information and can be requested from the responsible authority<sup>25</sup> in accordance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. However, law enforcement agencies are not *required* to publish the data that they have, even if they do collect it, nor is there any standardized format for doing so.

Legislation has been introduced<sup>26</sup> at the state level in recent biennia that would require collection and reporting of data as part of broader community advocacy efforts<sup>27</sup> around data transparency and reduced reliance on traffic stops for low-level violations. However, none have passed into law. Rather, agencies who record and release this data typically do so because of more local policy, community demands, or their own accord (a change in practice even if not an official requirement).

It is possible within most law enforcement CAD systems to track the initial reason for a

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<sup>24</sup> *Agency Statistics 2025* (2025). Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training.

<sup>25</sup> *Data Practices* (n.d.). Minnesota Department of Administration - Data Practices Office.

<sup>26</sup> *HF 4156 Introduction - 93rd Legislature (2023 - 2024)* (2024, February 2). Minnesota Legislature – Office of the Revisor of Statutes.

<sup>27</sup> *About - Justice for All* (2021, September 3). Justice for All.

traffic stop, but the systems must be programmed to do so. Entities that opt to track and release this data voluntarily (some for 10 or more years) have often done so in response to community- or task force- driven requests or ordinances. Some include traffic stops as part of a broader public ‘crime mapping’ feature on their websites. Some record only the time and place of traffic violations and stops, but not demographic information. And still others release full deidentified spreadsheets, data sets, or quarterly analyzed reports.

### ***Selected images of public traffic stop data dashboards from various MN jurisdictions***

**Filter by Year**  
2025

**Filter By Quarter**  
Select Quarter(s)

**Filter by Gender (Perceived)**  
Select Gender(s)

**Filter by Race (Perceived)**  
Select Race(s)

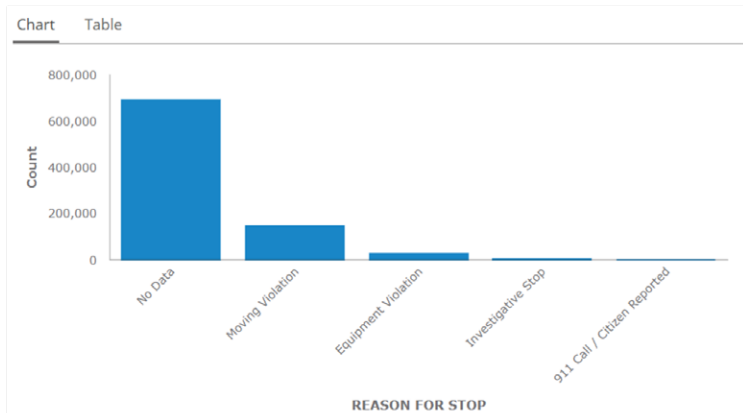
**Filter by Action Taken**  
Select Action(s)

**Filter by Reason for Stop**  
Select Reason(s)

**Filter by Search Conducted (Yes/No)**  
Select Yes or No

**Filter by Items Located (Yes/No)**  
Select Yes or No

**Filter By Neighborhood(s)**  
Select Neighborhood(s)



**Data**

- Select All
- ✳ Incidents >
- ✓ Cases >
- ✓ Arrests >



#### **SEARCHES OF VEHICLES AND PERSONS**

The search rate of no racial group exceeded 1.0%. The highest search rate was of Black drivers (0.25%). White drivers were searched at the second highest rate (0.15%), followed by Latino drivers (0.07%), Asian drivers (0.04%), and Other drivers and Indigenous drivers (0.01%).

	Indigenous		Other		Latino		Asian		Black		White		Grand Total	
	Count	Group %	Count	Group %	Count	Group %	Count	Group %	Count	Group %	Count	Group %	Count	Group %
Investigative	1	5.26%	39	12.54%	44	7.33%	20	3.50%	123	6.27%	111	3.42%	338	5.04%
Moving Violation	18	94.74%	264	84.89%	551	91.83%	547	95.80%	1808	92.15%	3074	94.73%	6262	93.35%
Vehicle Violation	0	0.00%	8	2.57%	5	0.83%	4	0.70%	31	1.58%	59	1.82%	107	1.60%
9-1-1 / Citizen	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.03%	1	0.01%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>1962</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>3245</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>6708</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 1 - Traffic Stops by Type of Stop & Race of Driver

## **Key Considerations**

The goal for this project and report was not to issue specific widespread recommendations related to traffic stops or connected data collection.

Rather, the focus was on developing a deeper understanding of what is common practice, what is unknown, what is being tried in Minnesota and elsewhere, and to explore possibilities for consideration at the nexus of community, government, enforcement and response, social services, and beyond.

Two key considerations arose as the primary directions being taken and recommended for traffic stop data collection. They encompass both potential legislative and policy pathways as well as broader cultural or process ideas to consider.

Each of these considerations is paired with challenges and opportunities derived from our research and conversations, to outline potential steps that can be taken in specific contexts and environments, as well as communally and culturally in our state.

# Required Data Collection and Transparency

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*“Data collection and analytics are the key to building a new approach. We can’t arrive at a safer version of policing unless we can measure what’s going on and respond to it.*

*This is particularly true with regard to policies and practice at the core of police operations today, including the use of traffic and pedestrian stops... Robust data collection benefits both law enforcement and communities.”*

***-Dr. Phillip Atiba Goff, PhD,  
Center for Policing Equity and Yale University and  
Barry Friedman, Policing Project at NYU School of Law***

A lack of standardized data begs the question: How do we understand patterns and improve outcomes in public safety if we aren’t able to access information about how many traffic stops occurred in our state in a given time period, the initial purpose of those stops, or any reasoning or demographics related to the people involved in those stops?

Improving statewide data availability and transparency about traffic stops would necessitate specific action by the Minnesota State Legislature requiring law enforcement agencies to collect and report that data. Such a requirement might secondarily depend on the implementation of a statewide system or contract for streamlined technology across agencies (and funding to make that happen).

There is precedent in other states<sup>29</sup> for policies requiring certain types of data collection, as well as model statutes created by organizations that exist and have been adapted and adopted.<sup>30</sup>

In our conversations and research, one police chief said of data collection questions, “Where your bark needs to be is at the Legislature.”

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<sup>28</sup> *Collecting, Analyzing and Responding to Stop Data: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies, Government, and Communities* (2020). Center for Policing Equity and Policing Project – NYU School of Law.

<sup>29</sup> *Traffic Stop Data* (2021, January 12). National Conference of State Legislatures.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix C: Policing Project Model Legislation Two-Pager: Police Data Collection and Transparency

## Challenges

- **Resistance:** There is some skepticism within law enforcement about amplified requests for data. There is fear of data requests being inherently incriminating, or for the purpose of showcasing negligence or bias. We heard concerns about officer safety during roadside traffic stops if steps are added to the collection happening on site (though one officer described their process as “20 seconds of quick data entry”). Additionally, there were comments that some of the data in question likely *does* exist but is purpose-dependent and therefore not public. We also heard concerns about redundant data capturing. Law enforcement leaders and peace and police officers may have questions about why data might be recorded and centralized, and why a particular format might be required. However, one police chief we spoke with (who is employed by a jurisdiction that already collects and publicizes traffic stop data) remarked, “One rule in our industry is leave no mystery.” Law enforcement resistance may be amplified by the following two challenges as well.
- **Technology:** Data and record management systems used by law enforcement agencies are not one and the same (though, as noted, some systems and platforms are more common than others). Because there is not a single unified system in the state or even in a given region, *exactly* replicable data collection can’t be required. Even though some agencies share platform portals, they still each code and organize data specific to their jurisdiction. Law enforcement leaders expressed that they can only direct and manage their own team and staff, and can’t be responsible for what another agency is tracking in a shared platform (even if they themselves have developed traffic stop data collection capacity for their own use). Furthermore, as CAD and RMS platforms grow and merge, they might be out of budget (or not used to begin with) for smaller jurisdictions, meaning inconsistency in the options for recording traffic stop data. As one officer put it, “If this is where [the state legislature] want[s] us to go, fund a statewide system.”
- **Capacity:** For agencies who are in the process of integrating traffic stop data collection, the capability exists within their systems but it is often created and customized in-house and becomes an added step for programmers or analysts on the IT side. Additional features, data requirements, or customizations will also require thorough communication and training for officers to ensure the technology is used effectively and consistently. This creates understandable concerns – especially in many smaller law enforcement agencies – about

capacity and the ability to be compliant with any potential new data collection or reporting requirements.

## Opportunities

- **Co-learning:** Ample work on traffic stop data collection implementation and innovation is being done across Minnesota and nationwide. Consequently, there are a great many opportunities for conversation, sharing, and co-learning between law enforcement agencies, research and higher learning institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. In our research, it was clear that successful approaches for instituting more robust data collection on traffic stops were influenced and bolstered by dialogue, peer sharing and mentorship, and modeling with other Minnesota agencies and organizations, as well as those in other states. Co-learning as a practice and a culture will amplify best practices, ensure that the growth of data collection practices can be efficient and thorough, and allow for coalitions doing this work – and the broader public – to continue to gain insights.
- **Funding:** If statewide solutions are sought, advocacy for policy change (and any subsequent legislation introduced) must include funding, to avoid promoting what have been known as “unfunded mandates” from the state that can face resistance for placing undue burden on individual agencies or parties. Policy proposals at varying levels to institute requirements for traffic stop data collection (and/or universalized collection technology) will be strengthened if they include the necessary capital for needed innovations, capacity, and rollout.
- **Analysis:** Partnerships between law enforcement agencies, colleges and universities, students, state agencies, community partners, and national organizations can simplify and strengthen the sorting, analysis, and publication of traffic stop data. Such collaborations would also allow for cost sharing, per aforementioned concerns. Data, if publicized, could be anonymized to ensure confidentiality. However, it should be noted that a data *collection* requirement from the state would not inherently be paired with a data *publishing* requirement. More simply, if traffic stop data collection was required and could be requested through already-existing public data request policies,<sup>31</sup> it would remove the steps of self-analysis or publication from within agencies. There are many options.

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<sup>31</sup> CHS Administration Handbook - The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (2025). Minnesota Department of Health.

## Reduction or Elimination of Non-Moving Violation Traffic Stops

The primary reason to consider modifying approaches to low-level traffic offense protocols is to address racial disparities in traffic stop numbers, experiences, and outcomes.

A preponderance of data *does* suggest disparities in policing and traffic stops: for example, recent analysis by the Stanford Open Policing Project shows that “officers generally stop Black drivers at higher rates than white drivers, and stop Hispanic drivers at similar or lower rates than white drivers,” but “in nearly every jurisdiction... Black and Hispanic drivers are searched more often than white drivers... Disentangling discrimination from effective policing is challenging and requires more subtle statistical analysis...”<sup>32</sup>

High profile police killings during traffic stops of Black men Philando Castile and Daunte Wright in Minnesota, among others locally and nationally, have incentivized action for policy reform and change.

With roadside stops in particular creating heightened safety risks for all parties involved, what would it look like to decrease those numbers?

Proponents of reducing or eliminating traffic stops for low-level offenses cite improved public safety, especially when evidence suggests that pretextual traffic stops may be most subject to racial bias.<sup>33</sup> Occurrences like a single taillight out or expired tabs generally pose minimal imminent danger, and transforming the response to these offenses from a traffic stop to an alternative communication or resolution would free up the police to work on more dangerous primary offenses, increasing efficiency alongside public safety outcomes.

Officers we spoke to (including those at law enforcement agencies who do collect traffic stop data) maintain that traffic stops are “part of the job,” made “with best intentions,” and that “the purpose of the traffic stop goes deeper than surface level.” While some law enforcement leaders agreed or acknowledged that over-policing can result in unnecessary pretextual stops, there is also a strong sentiment that pretextual stops with specific targets are preventative and necessary for public safety.

In one Minnesota jurisdiction, officers are directed not to prioritize traffic stops when there are 911 emergencies, and are also encouraged to be productive and be a face in the

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<sup>32</sup> *Findings* (2023). The Stanford Open Policing Project.

<sup>33</sup> Crann, T., Rosas, A., Burks, M., & Cheng, A. *Minneapolis police cut back on pretextual traffic stops in effort to reduce racial profiling* (2021, August 17). MPR News.

community during more ‘down’ times. An interviewed participant noted a correlation between low-level traffic stops and under-insured or uninsured motorists, citing the stops as preventative measures to interrupt what could become more dangerous situations in the future (and underscoring a greater general need for education about the importance of vehicular insurance). Traffic stops were also noted as something that can have a ripple effect and cause other motorists, who view cars that have been pulled over, to drive more safely.

Philadelphia became the first major city to ban ‘low-level offense’ stops<sup>34</sup> with Berkeley<sup>35</sup> and Minneapolis following suit in 2021 and other municipalities (and some states) continuing the pattern.<sup>36</sup> One Minnesota locality that reduced non-moving-violation traffic stops saw a correlated decrease in overall crime rates in the jurisdiction during the observed period.

In addition to precedent nationally and municipally, there have been some state legislative efforts<sup>37</sup> in Minnesota to shift the categorization of – and response to – non-moving-violations. Model legislation<sup>38</sup> exists as a resource for learning, advocacy, and reintroduced or additional state policymaking efforts in the future.

## Challenges

- **Reliance on Traffic Stops for Other Crimes:** As mentioned above, law enforcement may rely on the use of non-moving-violation traffic stops for broader public safety reasons, as long as they are backed by “intelligence [that] is relevant and fresh, [and] reasonable and articulable suspicion,” as one police chief noted. “Traffic stops are an effective way to tackle violent crimes,” said another law enforcement participant. These traffic stops have become habitual practice; it can be difficult to distinguish them from pretextual stops in policy because of overlap in type and use, and due to legal precedent. Some localities have eliminated low-level non-moving-violation traffic stops but have needed to walk back some of the bans for public safety pretext reasons. Said one leader,

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<sup>34</sup> Chang, A., Mehta, J., Intagliata, C., & Levitt, M. *Philadelphia councilmember on new city law banning minor driving infractions* (2021, November 4). NPR.

<sup>35</sup> *Traffic stops in the United States* (2025). Research Starters | EBSCO Research.

<sup>36</sup> McCann, S. *Low-Level Traffic Stops Are Ineffective—and Sometimes Deadly. Why Are They Still Happening?* (2023, March 29). Vera Institute of Justice.

<sup>37</sup> Walker, T. *House lawmaker hopes to lower temperature of traffic stops with change in law* (2024, March 21). Session Daily - Minnesota House of Representatives.

<sup>38</sup> Appendix D: Policing Project Model Legislation Two-Pager: Ending Traffic Stops for Minor Violations

“it’s hard to legislate.” Another mentioned investigative and pretextual stops as separate and distinguishable traffic stops, warning that “things can get missed” without them.

- **A Shift in Approach:** As detailed in the prior point, law enforcement agencies (and their leaders and even individual officers) have different philosophies on various traffic stops and how time, capacity, and resources should be utilized on them. Some jurisdictions have already moved away from performing stops for non-moving-violations, others would not change that protocol, and some are in the middle. In any and all cases, a full shift in how non-moving-violations are understood and approached - away from traffic stops and toward alternative responses – is a break from protocol, precedent, expectation, and breakdown of duties for many. This is a culture change that is not insurmountable, but may present structural challenges in the learning curve toward new models.
- **Need for Complimentary Public Policy:** Reducing or eliminating low-level or non-moving-violation traffic stops won’t on its own improve public safety, keep all motorists safe, or ensure that all drivers are insured. Reforms need to be paired with alternative protocol/practices, supports from partners, and time. Our conversations with public safety leaders across sectors emphasized the importance of public policies being developed with community members and subject matter experts and by taking true community needs into account for stacked and integrated improved outcomes.

## Opportunities

- **Equity and Efficiency Outcomes:** Over time, strategies that aim to reduce non-moving-violation traffic stops, along with data collection practices, can showcase patterns that are not effectively serving communities or that may be creating disparities in treatment or interaction with law enforcement. A reduction of traffic stops for non-moving-violations and an introduction of alternatives might bring to light underlying needs in a given jurisdiction that can be approached with tandem policy. With less enforcement time spent on non-moving-violation traffic stops, there may be increased opportunity for cross-sector brainstorming about upstream solutions, instead of only retroactive ones. More consistent data could highlight equitable ways to address community needs with wraparound services, resulting in better public safety outcomes for all. At a bare minimum, there are life and death consequences to stop reductions, and data to suggest reduction in criminal activity in some cases – clear equity wins.

- **Novel response:** Even the *consideration* of a reduction or elimination of non-moving-violation traffic stops allows for creative development of alternative responses. Novel response requires collaborations across levels of government and law enforcement, increases efficiency in law enforcement agencies, and could contribute to enhanced trust and relationships with community members and partners. In short, creativity (and the opportunity to try something else) leads to sound public policy.
- **Acknowledging, Understanding, and Addressing Bias:** Interviewed officers stated the importance of addressing racial and economic disparities. Said one leader, “What’s important is that we do [the stops] fairly, equally.” A focus on training rather than (or in addition to) policy change was raised, “to... ensure racial profiling can be avoided.” Regular trainings on stop and search constitutional policy and protections were also brought up as beneficial and an important ongoing requirement. An openness to conversation about disparities was clear and is critical. One police chief said, “[traffic stop data] boils down to racial profiling issues. I haven’t heard many people make an argument for this being an issue aside from racial profiling but that is a big issue we all need to be guarded by.” Everyone, including but not limited to law enforcement, requires deepened understanding about what bias, especially racial bias, is and how it operates interpersonally and systemically in society. Rather than disagreeing on whether or not bias exists in traffic stops (or in any facet of any system), there is opportunity to assume bias is a constant risk and turn together towards the problem to seek and build solutions from that standpoint.

*“The country is grappling with two critical issues: traffic crashes and racial disparities in traffic enforcement. Non-traffic-related stops are consistently discriminatory, with Black drivers 95 percent more likely to be stopped than their white counterparts. Communities should not have to compromise between road safety and equitable stop policies. It is entirely possible to achieve a future where everyone is protected and treated fairly...addressing racial disparities while simultaneously improving safety [is] a goal that benefits us all.”*

**-Charlotte Resing, Center for Policing Equity**

<sup>39</sup> Walker, T. *Statewide model standards sought for safer traffic stops* (2025, March 25). Session Daily – Minnesota House of Representatives.

<sup>40</sup> *National Coalition Launched to Modernize Traffic Enforcement and Safety*. Center For Policing Equity. (2025, March 5).

# Moving Forward

As Minnesota continues to explore the best ways to improve public safety, identified north stars remain:

- ❖ **Efficacy** – traffic enforcement that feels, to the community and to agencies / enforcement, like it is enhancing and amplifying public safety, and that feeling being backed up by the data on real outcomes.
- ❖ **Efficiency** – making good use of officer time and freeing up some of that time to work on critical and pressing public safety issues.
- ❖ **Equity** – ensuring that all residents can engage in a safe society without undue or disparate outcomes based on identities, protected classes, histories, and systems.

In addition to these goals, a number of important themes were highlighted throughout the duration of this project, and are detailed below:

## **Data and Good Governance**

Robust data is imperative for good governance; it bolsters opportunities for increased efficiency, equity, and effectiveness. Though the process of data collection may be doubted at times, it provides an opportunity to highlight the quality of work being provided, especially in public service and mission-aligned roles, departments, and agencies. A public safety leader we spoke with noted “[The] responsibility on us as public servants is to be transparent.” Data can help us to proactively drive the outcomes we seek in the future, not just look back on what occurred in the past.

Protection of privacy is exponentially important during a time period in our history that feels overwhelming, dangerous and polarizing for many populations. There is a notable and growing sense of caution, skepticism, and fear around the use of artificial intelligence – and overuse of technology – in community safety. It is imperative that implementation of data collection practices avoids oversurveillance and discrimination, and that data and identity privacy remain protected. We can require and standardize data while protecting privacy, and without making it public in all instances – deidentification, request processes, and policy distinctions can provide protective barriers for security for everyone from young people to elected officials to New Americans.

On the topic of sound data, we also learned from law enforcement and government leaders that simply using U.S. Census data, categories, and parameters is not sufficient. This data can be misleading for a number of reasons: the Census districts do not always line up with the jurisdictions of law enforcement agencies (especially if there are shared regions);

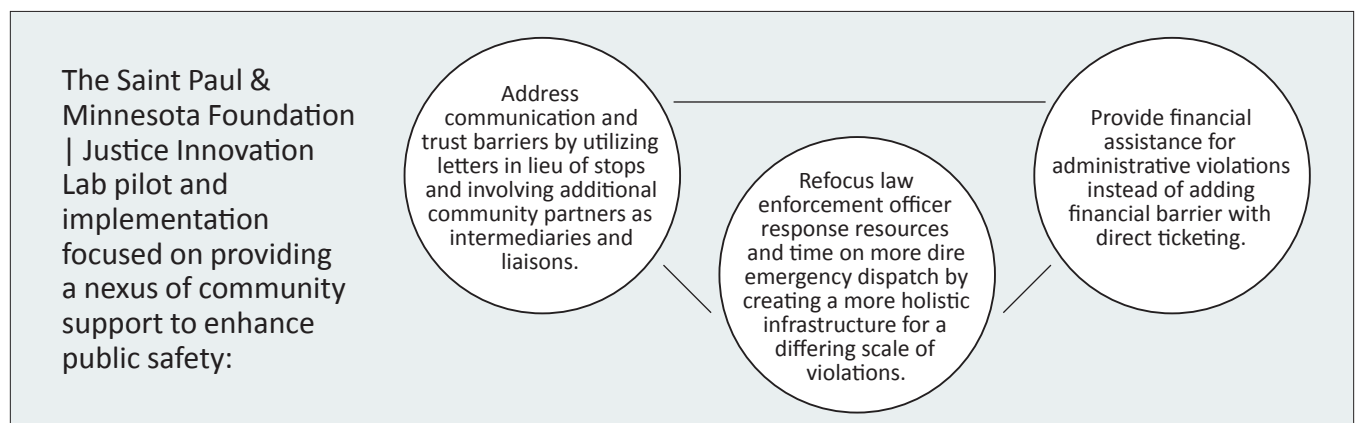
Census results are sometimes undercounted; and there might be limitations on racial, ethnic, cultural demographics and other identifiers. Most participants in this project echoed that data on traffic stops in Minnesota is better suited as distinct from Census data in collection and analysis.

When we asked law enforcement what future projects would be helpful to focus on, we heard interest in work that specifically distills data on traffic safety as it relates to traffic stops and traffic fatalities, with attention on the many efforts, ideas and attempts to address them. Data is lauded as valuable by all constituencies. As one participant put it, “How we’re using, collecting, [and] diversifying data is an area for growth.”

## Comprehensive Approach to Public Safety

Safety is not just about crime, punishment, and law, but about how our systems allow for Minnesota communities to act, react and thrive. This includes regional and cultural considerations and social determinants of health.<sup>41</sup> To further expand on an understanding of data collection on traffic stops, what is the qualitative capacity more broadly for public safety approaches?

A community leader we spoke with asked us to consider this real example: they’ve witnessed traffic stops being repeatedly conducted near a community hub where people purchase groceries and supplies, board public transit, attend appointments, and greet neighbors. The ramifications of non-moving-violations being addressed with traffic stops (ticket[s], court costs, license or insurance implications) can have a negative impact on an individual’s (and a community’s) overall sense of safety – the opposite of the intended goal. If traffic stops are targeted in said community hub area, it could discourage individuals from using these resources. We can return to the nexus of community safety supports uplifted as a model in Ramsey County’s initial pilot for examples of alternatives:



<sup>41</sup> *Social Determinants of Health* (n.d.). Healthy People 2030 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Broadening the scope of how we think about safety – with traffic enforcement being placed intentionally in a network of resources – allows us to more seamlessly work together for desired outcomes (detailed further in the next section).

## **Multifaceted, Multi-Sector Approaches**

Safer futures for our communities do not and will not happen in a vacuum. Several regional approaches are in place; communities work together to share capacity and resources for policing and public safety work, as well as for public safety innovations, community engagement, and data collection and sharing practices. There are many examples of creative, collaborative, alternative responses in our state, from novel companies<sup>42</sup> to intentional law enforcement and community partnerships<sup>43</sup> to behavioral crisis response<sup>44</sup> and embedded social work<sup>45</sup> teams working with and within government entities. At the center of these approaches are measures to meet people where they are at and build trust, which are critical considerations for moving forward.

Still more creative<sup>46</sup> collaborative response ideas were brought up in this research and others are yet to be implemented: community-sponsored repair clinics, collaborative trainings and town halls, and unarmed units and teams for vehicle safety, to name a few.

We heard of the need to remove silos, particularly from policing, as residents often think of the city and the police as different entities when they are not. Likewise, we need to break down the silos between agencies and between sectors in service of goals for safe communities.

Our conversations illuminated the need for further coordination and collaboration among entities that have similar goals or constituencies, or that are utilizing similar data. Intentional alignment is a sound strategy for data security and for strengthened collaborative public safety outcomes.

Systems change work is happening – it is successful and it is possible, but it takes time. We learned how critical it is for pilot projects and programs to be given ample time for trial, error, switching gears, and assessment. Leaders shared that intentional partnership-building has made implementation much more doable when the time comes.

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<sup>42</sup> *About – TurnSignl | On-Demand Lawyer App* (n.d.). TurnSignl.

<sup>43</sup> *The St. Cloud Rotary Community OutPost* (n.d.). The Public Safety Foundation.

<sup>44</sup> *Behavioral crisis response* (n.d.). Minneapolis – City of Lakes.

<sup>45</sup> *Helping People in Crisis* (2025). Dakota County.

<sup>46</sup> *Toussaint, K. These posters can help you picture alternatives to policing* (2020, June 9). Fast Company.

## Clear and Direct Definitions and Conversations

There is a marked want from all parties for direct understanding and conversation about public safety and police practices, including but not limited to traffic stop policy.

One police chief remarked in response to this project that if it's racial equity conversations we need to be having, let's have those conversations and not mask them as broad or veiled data conversations. The same chief said, "[we] need real and uncomfy conversations" about "racism in our country and society" because "that's what it's all rooted in." "There's a lot of people willing to talk about this, so let's talk."

Relatedly, a government leader indicated their belief that more conversations should be led by community members, with law enforcement focused on listening, learning, and hearing what could help combat mistrust. Ticking a demographic box is not enough. Leaning in to tough, uncomfortable, necessary conversations can become a bridge for growth, improvement, and innovation.

## Required Capital and Collaboration

Whether we are considering legislative efforts to streamline data collection on traffic stops, relying on community partners to open repair shops for vehicular violations, investing in social worker response programs, or amplifying community education, financial resources are needed.

Costs are high, federal-level program area cuts have been made, budgets are decreasing or in the red and margins are slim in all sectors; unfortunately, some extra-governmental public safety programs in Minnesota that supplement or replace traffic stops are sunsetting or suspending operations.<sup>47</sup>

To this end, diverse funding streams made up of government, for-profit, nonprofit, philanthropic, and community dollars will be necessary for policy expansions and innovations, or next steps of any kind.

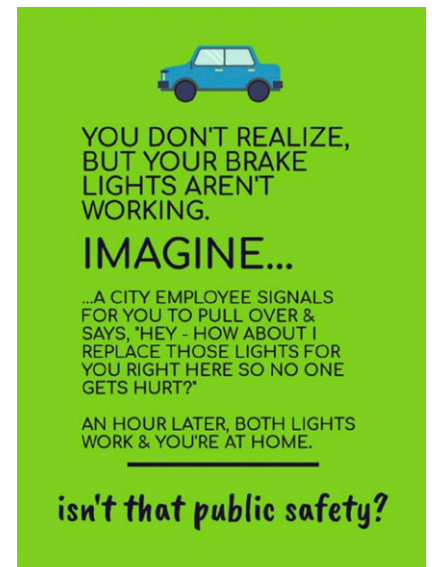


Image from @conflictransformation

<sup>47</sup> Important Dates & Instructions (2025). Lights On! | A Program of Microgrants.

*“I think the idea here is to ask about how cops (and the governmental authorities that oversee them) allocate their resources. After all, we all fund the police through our tax dollars. It’s not about trying to be overly friendly to criminals or critical of cops; it’s about trying to figure out what strategies are going to create the healthiest, safest communities.”*

*– Maurice Chammah, The Marshall Project,  
from ‘Justice Talk’ discussion series, February 2016*

## **Closing**

Perhaps the most notable takeaway from this project was the energy for continuing this conversation and broad consensus on the need for centering racial equity in training and understanding. There is anticipation and opportunity for facilitation building on the themes in this report.

In closing, this project amplified the need for civically engaged communities and data that can be accessed, analyzed, and understood in service of public safety. Leaders, residents, and cross-sector parties being involved and engaged with ongoing dialogue and project work about public safety will be critical. It is our hope that this report will provide one piece furthering Minnesota’s public safety puzzle. Thank you for engaging with this work.

Questions, feedback, ideas, and additional research and collaboration opportunities can be directed to **[policy@citizensleague.org](mailto:policy@citizensleague.org)**.

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<sup>48</sup> Burgos, Pedro. “Highlights From Our Justice Talk On Predictive Policing.” *The Marshall Project*, The Marshall Project, 25 Feb. 2016.

# **Resources**

Ongoing engagement bolsters effective and interconnected public safety work. Listed are just some of many resources for continued learning.

*listed alphabetically*

Brennan Center for Justice

Chiefs of Police Association

Community Oriented Policing Services – US Department of Justice

Crime and Justice Institute

Department of Public Safety

Fines & Fees Justice Center

Harvard 911 Alternative Resources

International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Center for Police Research and Policy

Justice Innovation Lab

Lights On Foundation

Mapping Police Violence

Minnesota Justice Research Center

National Crime Information Center (NCIC) – Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

National Police Accountability Project (NPAP)

National Policing Institute

Policing Project

POST Board

Stanford Policing

Toward Zero Deaths

TurnSignal

Urban Institute

Vera Institute of Justice

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# Appendix A – Citizens League Research Questions

## **Understanding Traffic Stop Data Collection in Minnesota Citizens League Research Questions**

### **State Level**

- How do local law enforcement agencies share data on traffic stops with the state?
  - Would it be possible to see the system or an example of the form/data collection for traffic stops?
  - Is this system searchable by officer, offense, etc.? How public is that data?
- Does state law require any data collection or reporting about the initial or original purpose of the traffic stop?
- Would it be possible to add new fields for data collection? (such as: the initial purpose of this traffic stop was \_\_\_\_\_)
- If an officer gives a driver a warning, is that recorded in any way? Or only recorded in the case of a ticket being issued?
  - Are officers required to pull license and registration with every traffic stop?
- How is demographic information for traffic stops collected? How do we know race/identity/gender of the person being pulled over – officer perception/best guess?
- Who else should we be talking to for this project?
- Any other questions you have for us?

### **Agency Level**

- How large is your department? (Size of force)
- How big of a population do you serve?
- Does your organization have a stance on traffic stop data collection?
- What are the biggest challenges facing your membership right now?
- What are the types of traffic stops you do?
- How do you collect information on the initial purpose of a traffic stop?
  - Would you be amenable to a process for collecting this information? What concerns or issues might that raise for your officers?
- How much discretion does an officer have in choosing to conduct a traffic stop? What goes into that decision? What kind of training do they receive, and/or what processes are they required to follow or document in conducting a traffic stop?
- Do you have any data on percentage of moving violations vs. non-moving-violation traffic stops?
  - How often are officers engaging in traffic stops for moving violations vs. other, non-moving-violation stops?

## Appendix A – Citizens League Research Questions

- How often is *another* more serious offense discovered after a non-moving-violation traffic stop?
- What are “non-moving violations”, “non-public-safety” or “pretextual” stops in your opinion? What are you looking for?
- Are there any resources you need that would make traffic stops go better or more smoothly? What would that look like for your officers?
- In the case of pretextual stop that led to another offense or violation, are you recording the original reason for the stop or only what else was discovered?
- Would an alternative process for addressing non-moving violations be helpful to you? Could an alternative process create efficiencies or save officer time to focus on more serious crimes/violations?
- Would you support or consider a policy of reducing reliance on non-public-safety traffic stops, similar to what Ramsey County tried?
- Who else should we be talking to for this project?

# Appendix B – Policing Project Model Legislation Two-Pager: Police Data Collection and Transparency



## POLICE DATA COLLECTION AND TRANSPARENCY

### THE PROBLEM

When it comes to policing, lawmakers lack even the most basic information about what police in their communities do.

Law enforcement agencies collect little data, and what data there is is too often hard to access. We do not know how many people are stopped each year by police, or even killed. We even lack basic data about how many complaints police departments receive and how much taxpayer money is spent to compensate victims of police misconduct. Coupled with a failure by some policing agencies to make public patrol guides and other basic rules officers are supposed to follow, elected officials and communities have little insight into what their local police actually do.

Publicly reporting basic policing information will allow lawmakers to hold officers and agencies accountable, and provides communities with the necessary information to ensure that policing is carried out in a way that addresses their needs.

### THE SOLUTION

This statute ensures that lawmakers and community members have access to basic information about individual law enforcement agencies as well as officer conduct. It also ensures that data collection practices are standardized across policing agencies so it is possible to compare police departments to each other. The statute also backs up all of these requirements with robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Our approach is comprehensive. Although some states have adopted piecemeal transparency legislation, none have gone far enough in providing lawmakers and the public with a clear understanding of policing in their communities.

### WHAT WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC

#### Information about agencies

- Requires law enforcement agencies to release basic information about the agency as a whole, including department policies and procedures, union agreements and payouts from police misconduct.

**Examples:** *Someone can look online to see their local police department's policy on the use of facial recognition.*

*Someone can see if their city has spent more money on police misconduct than neighboring communities.*

# Appendix B – Policing Project Model Legislation

## Two-Pager: Police Data Collection and Transparency



### POLICE DATA COLLECTION AND TRANSPARENCY

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#### Information about officer interactions with the public

- Requires policing agencies to collect and report out demographic data on all stops, arrests, use of force incidents and complaints against officers.
- All data is reported to the state attorney general in a standard format to allow people to see how their police department compares to others.

**Example:** *Someone can look online to see how many people were stopped by the police in their city, and to see if Black residents were disproportionately stopped.*

#### Information about investigations into complaints against officers and access to body camera footage

- Addresses public access to complaint records, use of force incidents resulting in death or serious injury and body camera recordings.
- Ensures that the public has access to critical information while also protecting individual privacy interests and respecting ongoing investigations.

**Examples:** *If someone is stopped by the police, and thinks they were treated unfairly, they can go to the department and ask to see video of the incident.*

*If a person is shot or killed by the police, video footage must be released to the public within a specified time.*

The Policing Project at NYU School of Law partners with communities and policy makers to enhance safety, democratic accountability, and transparency in policing. Our team of attorneys, advocates, and community organizers is ready to help you pass legislation to strengthen police accountability and reduce harm.

[legislation@policingproject.org](mailto:legislation@policingproject.org)

# Appendix C – Policing Project Model Legislation

## Two-Pager: Ending Traffic Stops for Minor Violations



## ENDING TRAFFIC STOPS FOR MINOR VIOLATIONS

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### THE PROBLEM

Police officers in the United States make more than 20 million traffic stops each year. Many of these stops have little to do with traffic safety. Instead, officers often pull people over for minor rule violations—such as hanging an air freshener or graduation tassel on a rearview mirror—as an excuse to go fishing for other crimes. Because there are literally hundreds of equipment and moving violations codified in the law, an officer can stop any driver, any time. Black drivers are disproportionately likely to be stopped—sufficiently so that “driving while Black” is a part of everyday vernacular.

The killing of Daunte Wright in Minneapolis in 2020 renewed calls to end law enforcement’s ability to make these pretextual fishing stops.

Low-level traffic stops—and the fishing expeditions by police that inevitably follow—feel unnecessary, unfair, and biased, and they create flashpoints of confrontation that too often become dangerous for both officers and motorists. These stops erode trust in police, rarely yield any useful crime-solving information, and divert police resources from solving more serious crimes. Limiting them will improve public safety for all.

### THE SOLUTION

This model legislation focuses on three main goals: (1) prohibiting traffic stops for low-level infractions, (2) limiting the scope of these stops, and the incentives that lead to them and (3) collecting robust data on officer stops.

### WHAT THE STATUTE DOES

#### **Prohibits traffic stops for low-level infractions**

The draft statute prohibits officers from stopping individuals for a clear, enumerated list of equipment violations and traffic infractions that are unrelated to public safety (e.g., a broken taillight, window tints, seatbelt violation).

Officers can still mail a citation to the individual or ticket them for it, if they stop the individual for a different, permitted reason.

*Why this approach:* Multiple courts have ruled that pretext stops violate their state constitutions, but it is difficult for defendants to prove that a stop was pretextual. By taking specified minor reasons for stops off the table, our statute enhances clarity by giving officers a clear list of what they can and can’t stop people for.

# Appendix C – Policing Project Model Legislation

## Two-Pager: Ending Traffic Stops for Minor Violations



### ENDING TRAFFIC STOPS FOR MINOR VIOLATIONS

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#### Limits searches

The draft statute prohibits officers from asking for consent to search unless they have reasonable suspicion or probable cause to believe that they will find evidence of a non-motor vehicle offense.

It also prohibits searches based solely on the smell of marijuana. Officers must have some other reason to believe that the person has illegal drugs in the car.

*Why this approach:* This approach reduces the intrusiveness of the stops that do take place—and minimizes the fishing expeditions that disproportionately target people of color. In addition, the smell of marijuana is too often used to justify searches—even in jurisdictions that have decriminalized marijuana.

#### Limits traffic stops related to low-level warrants

The statute prohibits stops based on warrants issued for low-level offenses—such as failure to pay a fine or fee, or to appear in court to resolve a traffic ticket or other infraction. It also puts limits on when a judge may issue a warrant for a minor offense in the first place.

*Why this approach:* In some jurisdictions, officers run plate numbers (either manually, or using an Automated License Plate Reader) to look for outstanding warrants—which can then become the basis for a stop. Warrants—even for low-level offenses in which an officer is unlikely to discover evidence of serious crimes—can escalate the intensity and danger of stops once they occur, as officers must take individuals into custody.

#### Data collection

The draft statute ensures robust data collection on stops, including demographic data.

*Why this approach:* Good data is essential to make sure that the statute is working as intended—and to help jurisdictions identify any disparities in traffic enforcement that require further attention.

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