

# Low Level Traffic Stops: Putting Policy Into Ordinance

Councilmember Paul Kashmann  
District 6



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# Agenda

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- Background, data, and research
- Overview of current internal DPD Policy and data
- Overview of draft legislation
- Questions and Discussion



# Why Address Low Level Stops?

**Low Level Stops**, also sometimes referred to as Pretextual Stops, or Non-Safety-Related Stops, are minor traffic violations that do not pose a threat to public safety.

Examples include: improperly displayed registration, an air freshener hanging from the rear-view mirror, heavily tinted windows or a cracked taillight.

Historically, nationwide, lower-level infractions have been used to justify stopping people of color in excessive numbers.



# What Research has Found:

## Low level stops create equity issues

- People of color are stopped, questioned, and searched at higher rates <sup>1</sup>.

## Low level stops do not deter, prevent crime, or improve road safety

- Low level stops result in the seizure of contraband in far lower numbers than stops than more serious violations <sup>2</sup>.

## Low level stops waste resources

- DPD, CAO, OMPD the courts all spend time prosecuting/defending these cases <sup>3</sup>.

## Low level stops squander police time

- Officers should be spending time investigating and solving more serious crimes <sup>4</sup>.

## Other impacts

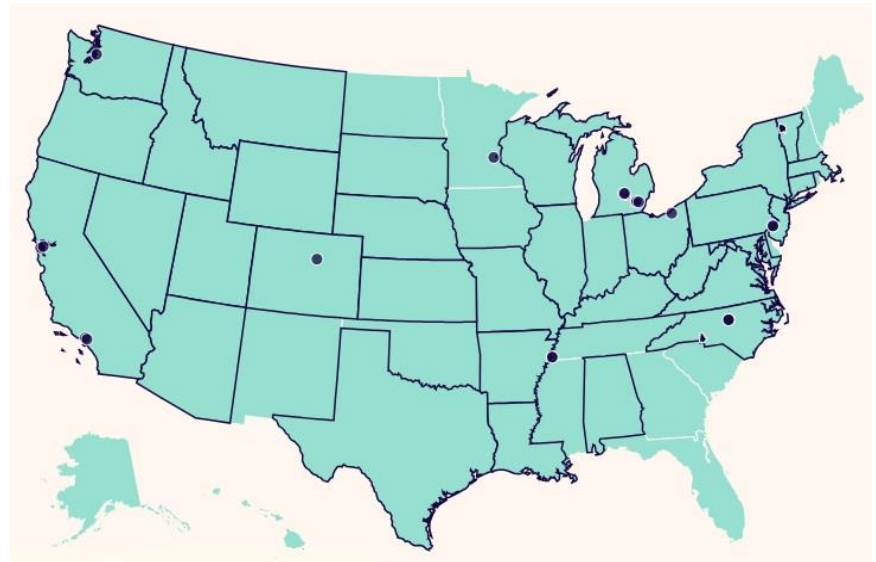
- Contact with law enforcement often leads to complications at home, work or school <sup>5</sup>.



# Action taken across the country:

9 Cities have some form of low level stop policy in ordinance:

- Ann Arbor, MI
- Memphis, Tennessee
- Philadelphia, PA
- Pittsburgh, PA
- East Lansing, MI
- Chapel Hill, NC
- Shaker Heights, OH
- West Hollywood, CA
- Ypsilanti, MI



An additional 33 states have some form of legislation that addresses low level stops. In total - 54 jurisdictions - including cities, counties, and states have some form of policy that addresses low level stops through executive order, law enforcement directive, prosecutor directive, or legislation.



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# Crime is reduced when focus shifts to more serious offenses:

- Limiting non-safety-related traffic stops improves traffic safety.  
Fayetteville, NC: PD deprioritized stops for minor equipment and administrative infractions and **focused instead on moving violations**; this **resulted in large decreases in traffic crashes** and decreases in racially disparate outcomes of traffic enforcement, with no associated rise in crime <sup>6</sup>.
- Crime does not rise when police shift to enforcing moving violations.  
**Less than one-tenth of one percent** (0.8 out of every 1,000) of traffic stops by the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (MNPd) for **non-safety-related infractions resulted in weapon possession charges**, and the **reduction of low level traffic stops had no impact on serious crime** <sup>7</sup>.
- Shifting away from low level stops reduces racially disparate outcomes.  
In 2021, four police departments in Ramsey County, Minnesota, adopted policies shifting their traffic enforcement focus to moving violations rather than non-safety-related infractions. As a result, Ramsey County saw **reductions in racial disparities in stops and searches**, with no associated increase in crime <sup>8</sup>.



# How we got to today:

2023 - CM Kashmann invited to participate in a cohort led by the Vera Institute of Justice regarding low level stop legislation.

May, 2024 - Partnership with DPD Chief Thomas implemented a low level stops policy in the Police Department Manual.

April, 2026 - Convening on Right-Sizing Traffic Enforcement at NYU School of Law. CM Kashmann and DPD Chief Thomas both attended and were panelists on the Decriminalizing Non-Safety Stops.



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**(2) LOW-LEVEL TRAFFIC STOPS:**

*Officers will prioritize traffic enforcement on activities that address high-risk traffic violations, such as reckless driving, driving under the influence (DUI), speeding, running red lights, and other vehicle operator behaviors that endanger public safety.*

- a. Low-level traffic stops (minor traffic infractions that do not pose an immediate threat to public safety) will not be conducted unless officers are acting upon articulable information in addition to the traffic violation, which may or may not amount to reasonable suspicion, regarding a serious crime (i.e., a crime with potential for bodily injury).*
- b. An officer's training, experience, and expertise may be used to articulate the additional information the officer used to initiate the stop.*
- c. When conducting a low-level stop becomes necessary, officers will articulate in detail within their report or street check why the stop was necessary.*
- d. Any stop for a moving violation, where its commission could result in a traffic crash or injury to a pedestrian, is authorized (e.g., running a red light, failing to stop at a stop sign, driving erratically, etc.).*
- e. Planned operations to address any low-level traffic offense may be authorized by the Chief of Police and/or their designee at their direction.*





# Targeted Enforcement Periods:

*"e. Planned operations to address any low-level traffic offense may be authorized by the Chief of Police and/or their designee at their direction."*

Following the implementation of the policy in May, 2024, DPD conducted five targeted enforcement periods addressing expired vehicle registrations:

- July 15-August 15, 2024
- September 23-28, 2024
- November 1-30, 2024
- April 20-May 20, 2025
- November 15-December 15, 2025



# Denver Data

2023

Jan through Dec: 20,075 (82.59%) stops resulting in no citation

2025

Jan through Dec: 15,073 (75.46%) stops resulting in no citation

## Before Internal Policy Implemented

2yr 4mo time frame

Jan 2022 through April 2024

- 45,143 (82.2%)  
traffic stops without  
any traffic citations



## After Internal Policy Implemented

1yr 11mo time frame

May 2024 through March 2026

- 30,456 (73.58%)  
traffic stops without  
any traffic citations



## No Traffic Citations

Jan 1, 2022 – Mar 31, 2026:

- 75,599 (78.5%)  
traffic stops without  
any traffic citations

Although stops have reduced, the reason for the stop remains unknown. CAD system limitations prohibit multiple dispositions when calls are closed which could result in some stops resulting in no citation to be filtered under as *warnings*, or *party advised*, or something else.



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# We don't have the data we need:

- The current accessible data does not tell us the WHY the vehicles were pulled over.
- Officers are not required to radio the reason for the stop, dispatchers are not required to document the reason for the stop.
- CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system is not a data collection software or a data reporting software.
- When asking DOS for traffic stop data, including the reason or resolution for the stop, citation data was what they could pull from the CAD system.
- Although not required, the reason for the stop could be documented on the Contact Card/Field Interview card which is entered into the records management system (RMS). The drop-down tabs in this form for Type of field interview and Reason for the person or vehicle to be checked do not include low level stop infractions.
- This results in a lack of documentation and the inability to pull data on the types of stops performed.



# Outreach:

- Chief of Police, Ron Thomas
- Director Denver 911, Andrew Dameron
- Department of Safety - Data Team
- Office of the Municipal Public Defender
- City Attorney's Office
- Office of the Independent Monitor
- City of Philadelphia- Councilmember Isaiah Thomas
- Vera Institute of Justice
- Cross Jurisdictional Discussion Group on Pretextual Stops
- District 3 Commander, Joel Bell



# Draft Legislation

- Place existing mandate into ordinance and update process for better data collection.
- Prohibits officers from conducting vehicle stops for minor traffic infractions unless the officer are acting upon articulable information.
- **Exemptions:** Any moving violation that could result in a traffic crash or injury, periods of targeted enforcement.
- **Reporting Requirements:** Will work with DOS to determine future date for implementation. Police shall provide written quarterly reports to council detailing the type of stop and reason for the stop.
- **Notification Requirements:** Police shall notify council when periods of traffics enforcement are conducted at the city-wide and police district levels.





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# Questions and Discussion



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# Appendix



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# Citations

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# Citations

6. Mike Dolan Fliss, Frank Baumgartner, and Paul Delamater, et al., “Re-Prioritizing Traffic Stops to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crash Outcomes and Racial Disparities,” Injury Epidemiology 7, no. 3 (2020), <http://perma.cc/S75L-HMUE>.

Vera Evidence Guide: [https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/images/STOPS\\_Evidence-Guide.pdf?dm=1709749280](https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/images/STOPS_Evidence-Guide.pdf?dm=1709749280)

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Vera Evidence Guide: [https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/images/STOPS\\_Evidence-Guide.pdf?dm=1709749280](https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/images/STOPS_Evidence-Guide.pdf?dm=1709749280)

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# Jurisdictions with Implemented Policy

| Jurisdiction   | State          | Type |
|----------------|----------------|------|
| Ann Arbor      | Michigan       | city |
| Memphis        | Tennessee      | city |
| Philadelphia   | Pennsylvania   | city |
| Pittsburgh     | Pennsylvania   | city |
| Chapel Hill    | North Carolina | city |
| Oakland        | California     | city |
| Shaker Heights | Ohio           | city |
| West Hollywood | California     | city |
| Ypsilanti      | Michigan       | city |
| Fayetteville   | North Carolina | city |
| Minneapolis    | Minnesota      | city |



# Jurisdictions with Implemented Policy cont'd

|                    |                |        |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|
| Los Angeles        | California     | city   |
| Culver City        | California     | city   |
| San Francisco      | California     | city   |
| Seattle            | Washington     | city   |
| Portland           | Oregon         | city   |
| Duluth             | Minnesota      | city   |
| Berkeley           | California     | city   |
| Evanston           | Illinois       | city   |
| Denver             | Colorado       | city   |
| Cook County        | Illinois       | county |
| Ramsey County      | Minnesota      | county |
| Mecklenburg County | North Carolina | county |
| Ingham County      | Michigan       | county |



# Jurisdictions with Implemented Policy cont'd

|                   |                |        |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|
| Chittenden County | Vermont        | county |
| Washtenaw County  | Michigan       | county |
| Suffolk County    | Massachusetts  | county |
| California        | California     | state  |
| Connecticut       | Connecticut    | state  |
| Oregon            | Oregon         | state  |
| Virginia          | Virginia       | state  |
| Washington State  | Washington     | state  |
| Illinois          | Illinois       | state  |
| New York          | New York       | state  |
| East Lansing      | Michigan       | city   |
| Vermont           | Vermont        | state  |
| Carrboro          | North Carolina | city   |



# Jurisdictions with Implemented Policy cont'd

|               |               |       |
|---------------|---------------|-------|
| Maryland      | Maryland      | state |
| Massachusetts | Massachusetts | state |
| Nebraska      | Nebraska      | state |
| New Jersey    | New Jersey    | state |
| Ohio          | Ohio          | state |
| Arizona       | Arizona       | state |
| Colorado      | Colorado      | state |
| Idaho         | Idaho         | state |
| Montana       | Montana       | state |
| Wyoming       | Wyoming       | state |
| Nevada        | Nevada        | state |
| Missouri      | Missouri      | state |
| South Dakota  | South Dakota  | state |



# Jurisdictions with Implemented Policy cont'd

|                |                |       |
|----------------|----------------|-------|
| Alabama        | Alabama        | state |
| Kansas         | Kansas         | state |
| Arkansas       | Arkansas       | state |
| Louisiana      | Louisiana      | state |
| Michigan       | Michigan       | state |
| Pennsylvania   | Pennsylvania   | state |
| North Carolina | North Carolina | state |
| Texas          | Texas          | state |
| Utah           | Utah           | state |
| West Virginia  | West Virginia  | state |
| Wisconsin      | Wisconsin      | state |
| Kentucky       | Kentucky       | state |



Link to Map:

<https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/criminalization-racial-disparities/public-safety/redefining-public-safety-initiative/sensible-traffic-ordinances-for-public-safety/stops-map>



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