



Ramsey County Sheriff's Office

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Elected Leaders of Minnesota,

I began my law enforcement career with the St. Paul Police Department in 1977. While there, I served in a variety of leadership roles, including Commander of the Juvenile Unit, before leaving to become the Ramsey County Sheriff.

For 45 years, I have closely watched crime trends, and I can say with certainty that the Twin Cities are at a historic point when it comes to criminal activity on our streets and in our neighborhoods.

Sadly, the alarming trends borne in other major cities have made their way to our state. Perpetrators are more brazen, their crimes more violent.

The question now is this: How will we respond?

Will we capitulate under the lament that “it's happening everywhere”? Or will we muster every available and possible legislative and community asset to combat the problems? These important questions require urgent answers, because we have limited time to act and reverse these trends before the human toll and economic consequences swamp our efforts.

There is a Fire Burning

While the increase in crime has weighed heavily on the entire metro, it's the City of Minneapolis that is at a tipping point.

Commissioner Alexander and Chief Brian O'Hara are quality choices to lead the city's public safety efforts, but they cannot succeed with the limited resources they have to combat the problems.

Minneapolis has already lost 300 police officers. Combine the mass exodus with the anti-police political rhetoric that some have found fashionable in recent years, and our largest city finds itself in the throes of a crime-fueled fire that won't be fought back without significant outside help. Their battle is unwinnable without your help.

Sadly, Minneapolis's problems are all our problems. Never have criminals been more mobile. Never have jurisdictions mattered to them less. Never have we seen young people so brazenly commit violent crimes. Their mobility is inspired by an epidemic of stolen cars, carjackings and gang rivalry across the metro.

Of course, violent crime rates have skyrocketed over the past two years. But, more importantly, every day another victim has their sense of security seared by crime, another victim becomes a statistic. But they aren't just statistics. They're real people, with real lives and real families. In many cases, they are moms driving their children to daily activities when their worst fear is realized.

We owe it to future victims to move quickly to protect them.



Special Session Needed to Stop the Fire

As crime has swept through our state, your law enforcement community has and continues to mobilize all available officers, civilians, volunteers and technology to meet the challenge. Every asset has been called into service. We are trying everything we can think of to stop the fire—partnerships, reallocation of people and resources, prevention, intervention and enforcement.

But it will not be enough.

Stemming the crime trends of the past two years will require the immediate help envisioned, discussed and largely agreed upon during the last legislative session. Those conversations and agreements were tabled months ago in hopes that they could be revisited at a later date. But waiting another six to eight months for a statewide response to the wildfire currently burning in our largest city will allow the blaze to become an inferno, to become unmanageable.

We cannot afford to delay legislative help.

I am urging that a special session focused specifically on crime be held immediately after this November's election—to address three critically important issues that are fueling the fire.

The Current Crime Crisis

Carjackings, shootings, robberies, assaults and homicides are on the rise—and they're leaving scars on the collective psyche of everyone who values safety, security and law enforcement.

The beaten and battered appear on local television and on the pages of our newspapers. They share their stories in hope of helping others, in hope that someone will do something to prevent anyone else from being harmed. Their words and images sear into our minds the idea that anyone could be next. And anyone could be.

According to data released by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, violent crime rose by 21.6 percent across the state last year, driven in large part by an alarming 23.9 percent increase in the seven-county metro.

In 2021, there were 201 murders in Minnesota, a record. There were nearly 11,000 aggravated assaults, 33.7 percent more than the previous year. Rape, robberies, motor vehicle theft and assaults on peace officers all followed suit, increasing significantly from prior years.

Our state's sense of safety and security is blistered and burned, and we need all elected leaders to take swift and decisive action to bring crime under control, restore order and rebuild a criminal justice system that is failing crime victims and their loved ones.

Juvenile Crime

According to the Minnesota House Research Department, the juvenile court has jurisdiction over individuals under the age of 18 who engage in unlawful conduct, with certain exceptions.

Unlike adult courts, which determine criminal responsibility and punishment, juvenile proceedings are designed to "protect the child from the consequences of his or her own conduct."



Sadly, our juvenile justice system is falling short—and its shortcomings are having an adverse impact on crime victims, the community and the children it exists to help.

In 2015, Ramsey County made the decision to close Totem Town, which served as a secure intensive treatment facility for young offenders. While the decision was made with good intentions, it left nowhere in the East Metro for courts to send our most vulnerable youth for services.

Today, offenders are either sent to Greater Minnesota facilities or, essentially, set free to offend again.

And we know, based on data and empirical evidence, that a small group of young offenders is responsible for a large number of the violent crimes being committed in our communities. In fact, there are about 75 young people in the East Metro committing the majority of the violent, juvenile crime. These young offenders need help. Sadly, they seem to continually get caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system—which seems to spin faster for our youth.

Left to their own devices, these young people will continue down their self-destructive path. On the other hand, if and when we—as leaders—commit to developing secure facilities where young people can receive the services they need, we may be able to reach them—and save them.

To give you a better idea of the challenges your sworn officers, deputies and troopers are facing, I've attached criminal history summaries for 10 young people who continually find themselves arrested, charged and released. Sadly, they are spinning out of control with no support, structure or meaningful consequences.

Recruitment and Retention

Across the nation and right here in Minnesota, law enforcement is facing a staffing shortage unlike any we've previously seen. From Grand Rapids to St. Cloud to St. Paul to Winona, police departments are seeing more officers leave the profession for medical reasons, take early retirements or turn in their badges after experiencing the increased stress that comes with more calls for help, more crime, fewer colleagues and less support from some elected officials.

Recently, one first-ring suburban police chief told me he lost three of his 18 sworn officers in a matter of days—one left to escape the searing stress of running from call to call, another left for medical reasons, the third for a job in corporate security that pays more and takes less of a toll on his physical and emotional health.

Officers and deputies are the backbone of our law enforcement agencies. We need our state leaders to support them.

Thankfully, there is already a framework in place to address these issues.

A Plea for a Special Session

Last year, the House and Senate worked on legislation that would have invested \$250 million in public safety and made an immediate impact on reducing crime across the state:

- \$2.4 million for law enforcement agencies to coordinate efforts to combat murders, shootings, carjackings and other violent crime



- \$600,000 for State Patrol air support
- Increased sentences for dangerous offenders who commit a third violent crime
- \$15 million for local community policing
- Funding for more BCA agents to investigate crimes and ambassadors to prevent them from happening
- Carjacking defined as its own crime, with enhanced sentences
- Enhanced penalties for people who flee from an officer and create unreasonable risk to others
- Expanded use of tracking devices on stolen motor vehicles
- \$2 million for police officer recruitment
- \$2.5 million for tuition reimbursement for police officers.

These are just some of the critically important and impactful actions the Legislature was considering—and largely agreed on.

In addition, HF 4624 and SF 4286 would have earmarked \$10 million for small, secure facilities in Ramsey County to provide intensive treatment to juvenile offenders. Sadly, nothing came of the efforts.

I ask you, as state leaders, to take action to douse the flames of crime with a coordinated effort. Provide immediate funding for innovative and effective violent-crime-fighting measures. Establish secure treatment facilities for young people who need help. Assist Minnesota's law enforcement agencies as they work to keep the people they serve safe.

My fear—a fear shared by crime victims, parents of young offenders, and the general public—is that without leadership and investment from the top, our state's sense of safety and security will continue to erode.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my urgent plea for help.

Sincerely,

Bob Fletcher
Ramsey County Sheriff