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New 2023 Traffic Stop Data Report Reveals Chicago Police Department Superintendent Snelling Falls Short in Addressing Racially Biased and Ineffective Traffic Stops

CHICAGO— Impact for Equity and the Free2Move Coalition recently released the latest update to [A New Vehicle for “Stop and Frisk,”](#) supplementing the report with 2023 data showing a persistent trend in the Chicago Police Department’s (CPD) use of excessive, ineffective, and racially disparate traffic stops for minor violations. The 2023 Traffic Stops Data Report further sheds light on the lack of progress made by Superintendent Larry Snelling in his first quarter in office, despite commitments to reduce inefficient traffic stops and focus on dangerous crime.

After 2015, there was an over 700% increase in traffic stops, largely attributed to the strategic approach of CPD in leveraging pretextual stops, using minor traffic violations such as expired registration or an unlit taillight to uncover non-traffic-related criminal behavior.

This new report reveals a 5% surge in traffic stops in 2023, reaching a total of 537,313 stops, the second highest number in two decades. Licensing and registration violations remained the leading category of traffic stops, increasing to 44.4%. Only 3.7% of all traffic stops resulted in citations, 2.2% of stops resulted in arrest, and only 0.75% of stops resulted in any contraband recovery. Despite the increase in stops, only 0.5% of stops yielded the recovery of a gun, which remains largely unchanged from 2022. Furthermore, the data exposes significant racial disparities, with Black and Latine drivers disproportionately targeted for stops, particularly on the West Side of the City. Despite constituting less than 30% of the population, Black drivers accounted for over half of all traffic stops.

"The statistics speak volumes: less than 0.7% of traffic stops are for speeding, yet the pretextual stops continue," said W. Robert Schultz III, Campaign Organizer at Active Transportation Alliance. "As we engage with Chicago residents on matters of mobility, the recurring concern is speeding and its devastating impact on pedestrians. It's clear that we need a shift in focus towards truly effective measures for traffic safety and redirect resources towards strategies that address real dangers on our streets."

Maurice Woodard, leader and Organizing Director for Equity and Transformation said, "I've experienced firsthand how pretextual stops can escalate into unwarranted searches. I have been repeatedly pulled over for my legal window tints, only to have it serve as an excuse for invasive searches, despite never owning a gun. Like many others in my community, I've felt harassed by pretextual stops, violated and unfairly targeted. That's why I stand with the F2M coalition in the fight to implement policy that creates equitable policing."

In spite of mounting evidence highlighting the lack of traffic safety benefits, CPD officers continue to conduct large numbers of pretextual traffic stops under Superintendent Snelling’s tenure. Although he pledged to refocus the department's efforts on dangerous driving behavior and serious crime, the data suggests that, while there have been some adjustments, the overall practice of excessive traffic stops involving Black and Latine communities for minor violations remains largely unchanged and, in some cases, has become more targeted.

In Superintendent Snelling's first three months on the job, traffic stops numbers slightly decreased but remained high. With 118,811 stops, in Q4 2023 CPD far exceeded the total number of traffic stops made in all of 2015. Licensing or registration violation stops increased constituting 48.7% of all stops, a higher share than in 2023 overall, while moving violation stops represented a smaller proportion at 24.6%. Most traffic stops were not made for offenses indicating dangerous driving behavior and the stops rarely produced evidence of criminal activity as demonstrated by low rates of citation, arrest, and contraband recovery. Despite comprising around 81% of all stops, the proportion of Black drivers stopped slightly decreased to 47.2% while the proportion of Latine drivers increased to 34.1%.

In addition to the alarming racial disparities, this ineffective strategy is a drain on police resources and [as local reporting has shown](#), prevents police from responding to serious emergencies like calls to 911. “Pretextual stops are an ineffective strategy for uncovering evidence of criminal activity and pose serious public safety risks by diverting resources away from pressing safety issues like 911 call response,” said Joi Imobhio, Policy Strategist at Impact for Equity. “Most importantly, Black and Latine drivers continue to bear the burden of racially disparate traffic stops for minor traffic offenses that can precipitate harassment, violent use of force, and unmerited searches.”

The data here in Chicago is corroborated by research from national experts on equitable policing like the [Vera Institute of Justice](#), [the Policing Project at New York University School of Law](#), and [the Center for Policing Equity](#) that shows these minor stops do not improve public or road safety and instead result in considerable racial disparities. In response to this research and data in their own jurisdictions, [cities and states across the country](#) have taken action to curb this practice in light of the serious racial disparities and drain on police resources.

Impact for Equity and the Free2Move Coalition are calling on Superintendent Snelling to work with the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability to prioritize evidence-based approaches to traffic safety that promote equity and rebuild trust with the community. Drawing on the analysis of Chicago’s data, national research, lessons learned in other jurisdictions, as well as the experiences of people stopped here in Chicago, the Free2Move Coalition developed a [three-pronged policy solution](#) that will meaningfully reduce CPD’s racially disparate and ineffective traffic stops practices by limiting stops for low-level offenses, eliminating pretextual traffic stops, and limiting consent searches during traffic stops.

About Impact for Equity:

Impact for Equity, formerly known as BPI, is a public interest law and policy center that has worked at the front lines of racial, economic, and social justice in the Chicago region and Illinois for over 50 years. Learn more about us at www.impactforequity.org.

About the Free2Move Coalition:

The Free2Move Coalition is an alliance of community and advocacy organizations working to create a safer, more racially equitable system of traffic safety in Chicago. The Coalition’s work centers around crafting a system of traffic safety that works for everyone but especially those who have been most impacted by discriminatory police enforcement. To read more about our traffic stops data, findings, and recommendations visit www.Free2MoveChi.org.

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