



Ramsey County Sheriff's Office

Bob Fletcher, Sheriff

Office of the Sheriff

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

Dear Commissioners,

On Thursday evening, I had just finished reviewing County Manager Ryan O'Connor's "Request for Board Action" and a budget memo from Chief Financial Officer Alex Kotze to Mr. O'Connor when I was notified of another murder in Saint Paul — this time on the West Side.

Today, after watching the County Board meeting to discuss last year's budget, I was once again struck by the fact that there was little or no discussion regarding the significant increase in criminal activity in the metropolitan area. There was no mention of the fact that responding to crime has a related cost. Now that the 2022 budget discussion is over — **Can we talk about crime now?**

For four years, crime has been rising and our residents have been living in an elevated state of fear. And for four years, the County Board has publicly ignored this issue and failed to act. In fact, you have De-funded Law Enforcement. Responding to citizens' concerns about crime, at times, requires resources. This is one of those times.

Last Monday evening while standing in the shadows of a local high school surrounded by dozens of caring people, I was reminded of your lack of public expression of concern for victims of crime.

We were gathered at Harding High School, where a 15-year-old child had been stabbed and killed just days before. There were a lot of tears and hugs. Most importantly for you to know, there were also a lot of calls for leaders to act on behalf of the growing number of people who've been victimized in our county. And to prevent others from becoming victims in the future.



As I looked at the hundreds of people who came together for a common cause, I realized that none of you were there. In fact, I can't recall seeing any of you at a vigil for the 100-plus people murdered in Ramsey County over the past four years. Nor do I remember any public statements from you regarding the current youth crime epidemic or the trauma it has inflicted on so many residents who sadly became victims of carjackings, robberies, shootings, burglaries, assaults, and auto thefts.

I only recall Commissioner Reinhardt telling me not to tell people crime is at an "all-time high" because it scares citizens. Sadly, last year, Saint Paul set an all-time high for homicides. In 2021, the city set an all-time high for carjackings.

Now, a child has been murdered inside a school. Fear hangs thick in classrooms, where no student, teacher, staff member, or parent should ever have to worry about their safety. Parents are asking — no, actually, they are begging — leaders to act.

As a County Board, your lack of action to address the crime crisis in our county over the past four years appears to many to be symptomatic of a larger problem. There is a growing public perception that the County Board has more concern for the perpetrators of crime than for their victims — and their future victims.

I've spent my entire career working to make our community a safer place. I started patrolling the streets in Saint Paul as a young officer back in 1977. Since then, I've worked as a sex crimes/homicide investigator, and commanded the Saint Paul Police Burglary and Juvenile Units before being elected Ramsey County Sheriff.

Over the past four decades, I've worked with numerous city, county, and state elected officials. Together, we developed innovative crime reduction strategies. We stood shoulder to shoulder with loved ones, friends, and residents for people who lost their lives to preventable violence.

I wonder what many of the great Ramsey County Commissioners from the past must be thinking. People like Warren Schaber, Hal Norgard, Ruby Hunt, John Finley, Diane Ahrens, Don Salverda, Bob Orth, and Tony Danna. Leaders who cared deeply about the safety of people who lived and worked in Ramsey County. Leaders who weren't afraid to talk about crime — and then take action.

In addition to public expressions of concern for victims, an elected body can demonstrate its commitment to public safety in a variety of ways. One way is to properly fund law enforcement activities. Restoring the \$2 million cuts to our budget over the past three years (including a \$1.2 million egregious vacancy factor cut) and fully funding the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office would be a good place to start.



The lack of full funding for law enforcement jeopardizes the safety of our residents, our jail staff, and our inmates. Last year, the cuts actually cost taxpayers more money because we were forced to increase overtime to meet our statutory mandates. As a snapshot, the cost of providing meals to people in-custody increased by nearly \$590,000 and the cost of cleaning the jail increased more than \$100,000. These are just some examples of the inflationary costs necessary to run a jail.

We closely monitor and manage our overtime and work hard to keep costs low. But, as you know, there have been increases in crime, increases in the jail population, increases in court security needs — and all of these have led to increases in overtime. And, as you have known since May 2022, the jail has been overcrowded. In fact, starting in May, we warned you five times about jail overcrowding and the related increased costs.

In her memo, Ms. Kotze notes a 40 percent increase in our 2022 overtime (\$1 million). However, she fails to acknowledge the 40 percent corresponding increase in our jail population, prisoner transportation costs, hospital security costs, and court security needs. Her memo also states that we could have “shifted resources to the ADC for the care of clients as needed” without any recognition of our many other important statutorily mandated duties.

In addition to our responsibilities in the jail, there are more than 2,000 people walking around Ramsey County right now with active felony warrants. I imagine residents want these criminals held accountable for their actions, and we intend to make sure that happens.

The decision to close Boys Totem Town in 2019 without viable alternatives to treat serious youth offenders is part of the reason juvenile crime has grown so much and so fast. Denying young people accountability and treatment destined many to fail. Thoughtful juvenile detention and treatment saves children's lives.

As you know Minnesota Statutes state that the Sheriff shall:

- Keep and preserve the peace of the county.
- Pursue and apprehend all felons.
- Attend upon the terms of the district court, including court security.
- Execute all processes, writs, precepts, and orders issued by the court.
- Operate the county jail.
- Search and drag for drowned bodies, and search and look for lost persons.
- Take charge of, transport, and deliver any person who has been committed by the district court of any county to the care and custody of the state.
- Process warrants, gun permits, and court-related orders.
- Transport and extradite fugitives from justice and return them to the county.



These are just some of our statutory mandates that the sheriff's office must perform to comply with state law — and ultimately “keep and preserve the peace of the county.”

We cannot accomplish our mission as long as the Ramsey County Board continues to make funding decisions that don't address the needs and values of our community.

We have no objection to extra scrutiny of the operations and spending of the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office. In fact, for the past three years we welcomed county finance staff to regular cooperative reviews of our budget throughout each year. Even they recognized we were under-funded. Closer analysis in 2023 will lead to the same conclusion. Simply speaking, our spending is tied to crime and the jail population.

In June, we will be submitting a board action for a 2023 supplemental budget funding request in the amount of \$2 million to cover the costs of performing our mandated duties, including safely housing inmates.

Until then, there are other policy issues the board should consider. I welcome these conversations in the coming months. For example, the County Board could pass a resolution supporting School Resource Officers in every Ramsey County school. Suburban schools in Ramsey County have 15 School Resource Officers, while Saint Paul Public School have none.

The simple question is: “Why should the children in city schools be less safe than the children in the suburban schools?” You must ask yourself if that disparity is consistent with the County Board's values. If not, maybe the county should consider establishing a grant program out of its \$168 million dollar fund balance “savings account” to ensure School Resource Officers in all schools.

In closing, in addition to preventing and solving crime, the Sheriff's Office has an obligation to keep people informed on current trends. This information leads to healthy public discussion regarding how to keep our communities safe, and hopefully results in better decisions by our local elected officials. But, please remember it's not my comments that scare people — it's actually the crime.

Sincerely,

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

Bob Fletcher
Ramsey County Sheriff