



CHICAGO 2023 TRAFFIC STOPS DATA REPORT

APRIL 2024

Each day Chicago Police Department (CPD or the Department) officers make over one thousand traffic stops around Chicago. Data indicates that most of these stops are made under the pretense of a minor traffic violation when the true purpose is to fish for evidence of a crime, despite there being no evidence that a crime has been committed. Repeated analyses show that these traffic stops are not improving traffic or public safety. Instead, pretextual traffic stops are disproportionately impacting Chicago's Black and Latine drivers and communities and wasting our City's resources.

Last year, Impact for Equity and the Free2Move Coalition published reports showing CPD has dramatically increased their use of racially discriminatory traffic stops since 2015 despite clear evidence showing this strategy rarely leads to arrests or discovery of weapons or drugs.¹ This Traffic Stops Data Report tracks that trend into 2023 using newly obtained 2023 traffic stop data, and it shines a light on CPD's new Police Superintendent Larry Snelling's first quarter as the head of the Department.²



BACKGROUND

Chicago's rise in traffic stops over the last several years is due in large part to CPD using traffic stops as a strategy to find non-traffic criminal activity.³ Officers may choose to make a traffic stop to enforce traffic laws and improve traffic safety. But often they instead choose to use a minor traffic violation as an excuse to pull someone over and search for signs of other criminal activity that they do not have reasonable suspicion of; this is called a pretextual traffic stop.⁴ These minor traffic violations are traffic offenses that typically do not present a danger to others on the road, like expired registration or having one unlit headlight.⁵ These stand in contrast to more dangerous offenses like speeding, reckless driving, or driving under the influence. Pretextual stops create a legal loophole that allows officers to stop, question, and investigate a person where they would otherwise need legally sufficient criminal suspicion. By using these stops to fish, they assume they will eventually find evidence of criminal activity.⁶

However, data shows that a strategy focused on pretextual stops is not an effective way to find evidence of criminal activity. Further, there are serious public and traffic safety consequences to a strategy that allocates significant resources to performing pretextual traffic stops. A heavy focus on minor traffic violations means police cannot respond to dangerous driving behavior.⁷ Reporting also suggests that spending time on traffic stops takes away from police's time to respond to pressing safety issues like 911 calls.⁸ Investing significant officer time in traffic stops with only minimal discovery of criminal activity or dangerous driving is also a waste of government resources.

Moreover, the strategy contributes to a crisis of trust between overpoliced communities of color and law enforcement. History makes clear that pretextual stops result in high racial disparities. Because there are hundreds of small ways a driver can violate the traffic code, police officers and departments have countless opportunities to choose to make a traffic stop. Data shows that police routinely use this discretion to target drivers or communities of color as Black and Brown drivers are often disproportionately stopped, searched, and arrested.⁹ When a person feels as if they are merely seen as a target for investigation or criminalization because of the color of their skin or the neighborhood they live in, they may be less likely to see police as partners in building community safety.¹⁰ Thus, traffic stops can lead to dynamics between police and civilians that are counterproductive to law enforcement's stated goals of solving crimes.

Given the serious drawbacks and lack of evidence of efficacy behind traffic stops as a policing strategy, this Data Report asks whether and to what extent CPD's traffic stops strategy continues to be excessive, ineffective, and racially discriminatory.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

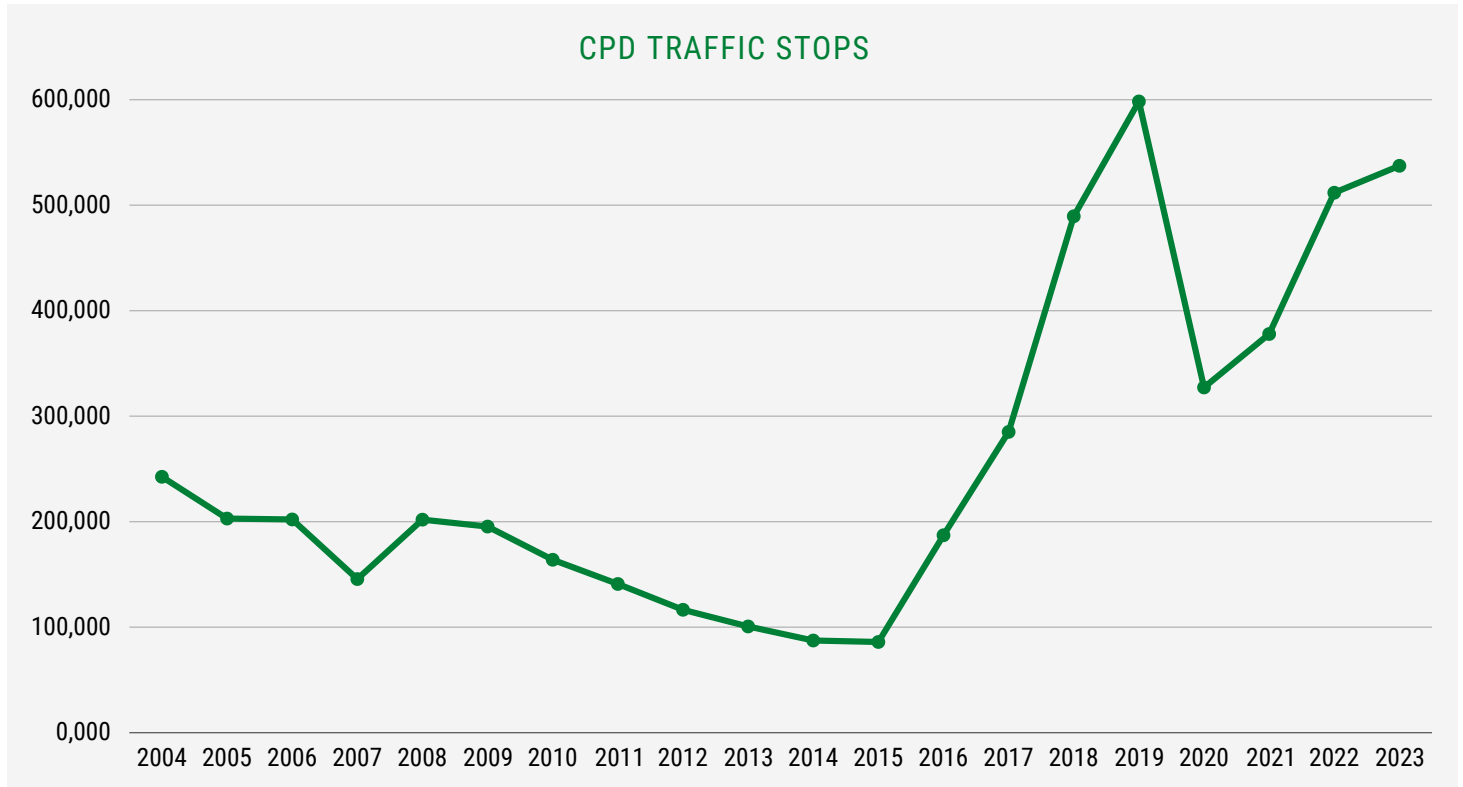
Our analysis shows that in 2023 CPD continued to make large numbers of racially disparate traffic stops for minor offenses despite clear evidence showing the stops have little to no public or traffic safety benefits. The 2023 results show:

- CPD traffic stop numbers continued to climb in 2023.
- Traffic stops in 2023 increasingly focused on minor traffic violations for improper registration or light violations, offenses which generally do not pose traffic safety risks.
- Only a small percentage of 2023 traffic stops resulted in citation, arrest, and contraband recovery.
- Racial disparities in traffic stops continued in 2023, with Black and Latine drivers being disproportionately stopped and arrested.
- The concentration of traffic stops on Chicago's West Side communities grew more pronounced in 2023.

These findings underscore the serious and urgent criticisms of CPD's continued reliance on this harmful practice.

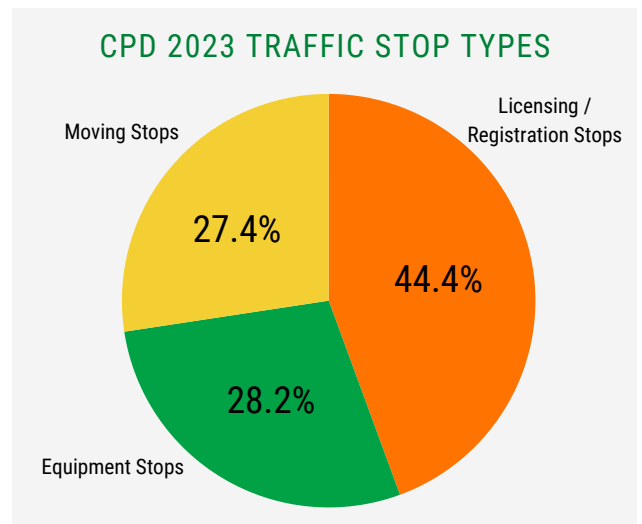
TRAFFIC STOPS CONTINUED TO RISE IN 2023

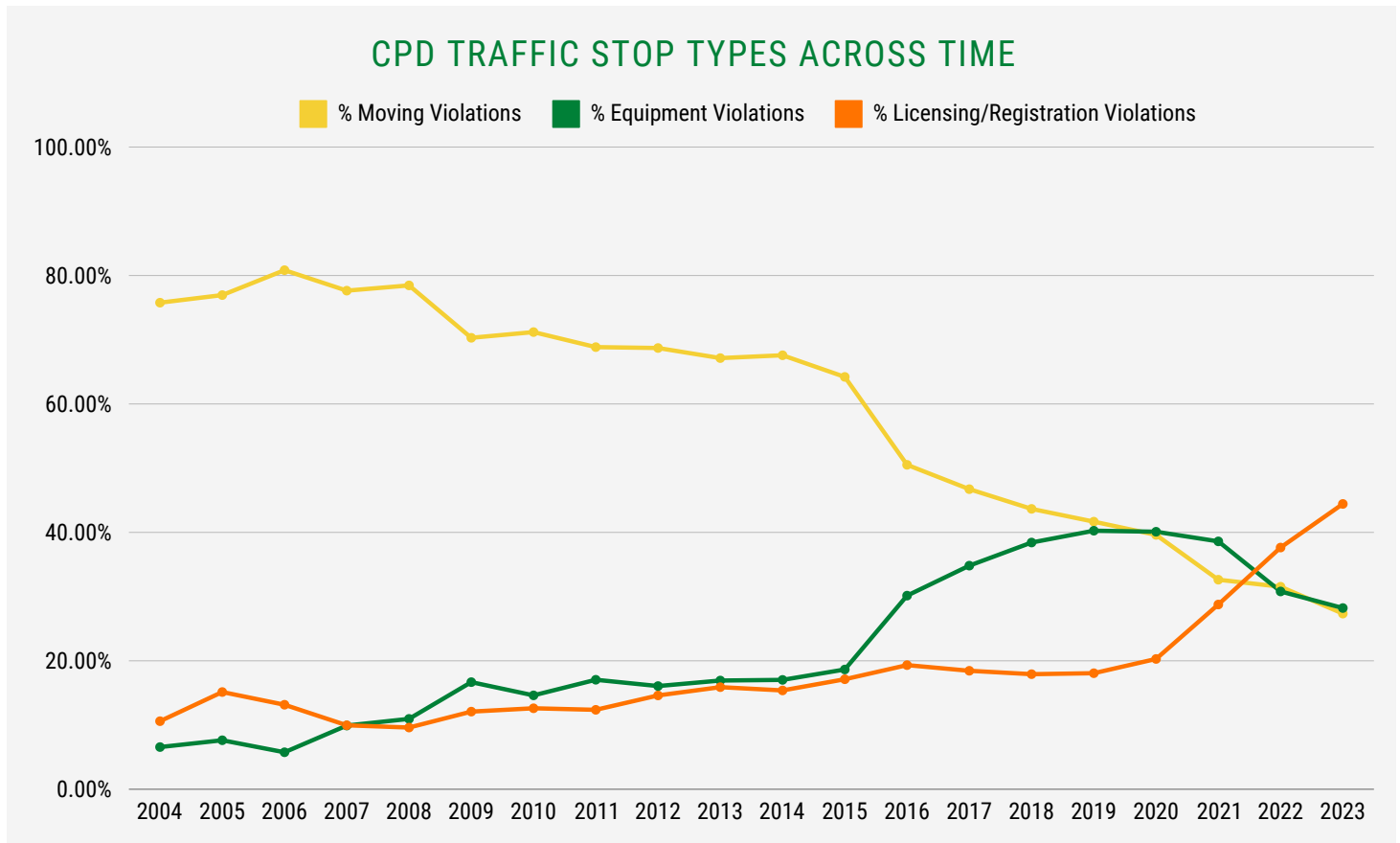
From 2022 to 2023 stops continued to grow, with stop numbers increasing by 5% from 511,796 in 2022 to 537,313 in 2023. Although the escalation has slowed from last year, when stops increased by 35%, 2023 still represents the second highest stop total in the last twenty years.



LICENSE AND REGISTRATION STOPS CONTINUED TO INCREASE WHILE MOVING STOPS DROPPED

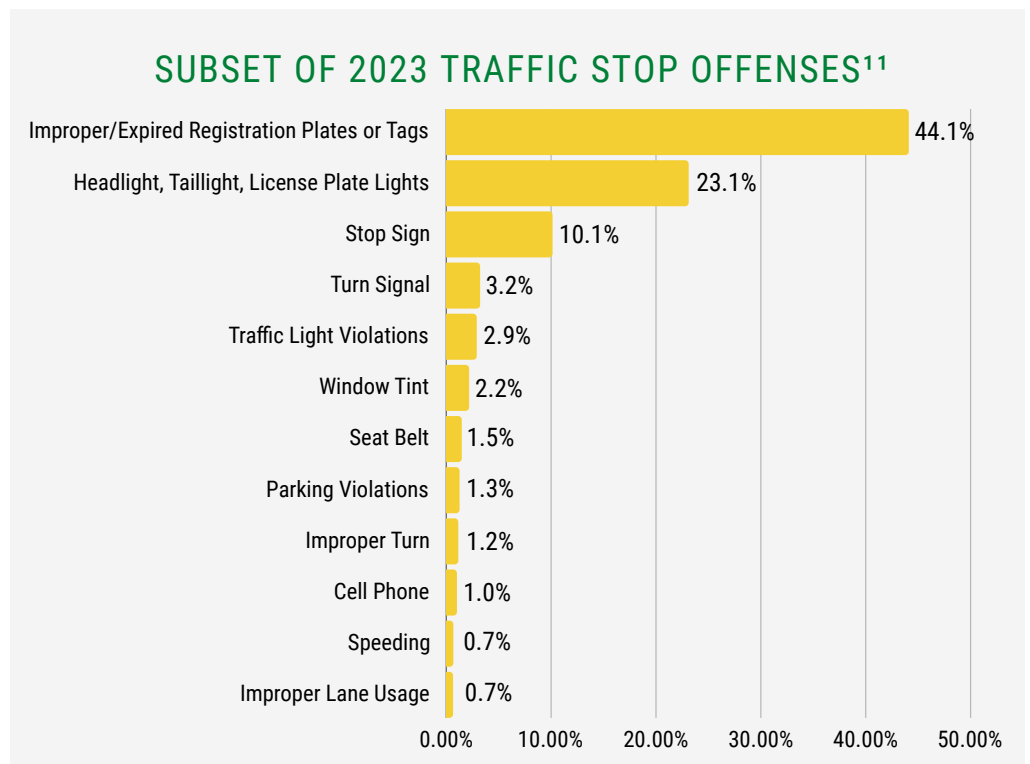
In 2022, for the first time, licensing and registration violations became the largest category of CPD stops. That trend continued in 2023. **Licensing and registration violation stops increased from 37.6% of all stops in 2022 to 44.4% of stops in 2023.** Since 2020, the percentage of stops for licensing and registration violations has more than doubled. Meanwhile, the percentage of stops for moving violations—the category of traffic behavior most likely to be dangerous on the road—decreased, from 31.5% in 2022 to 27.4% in 2023.



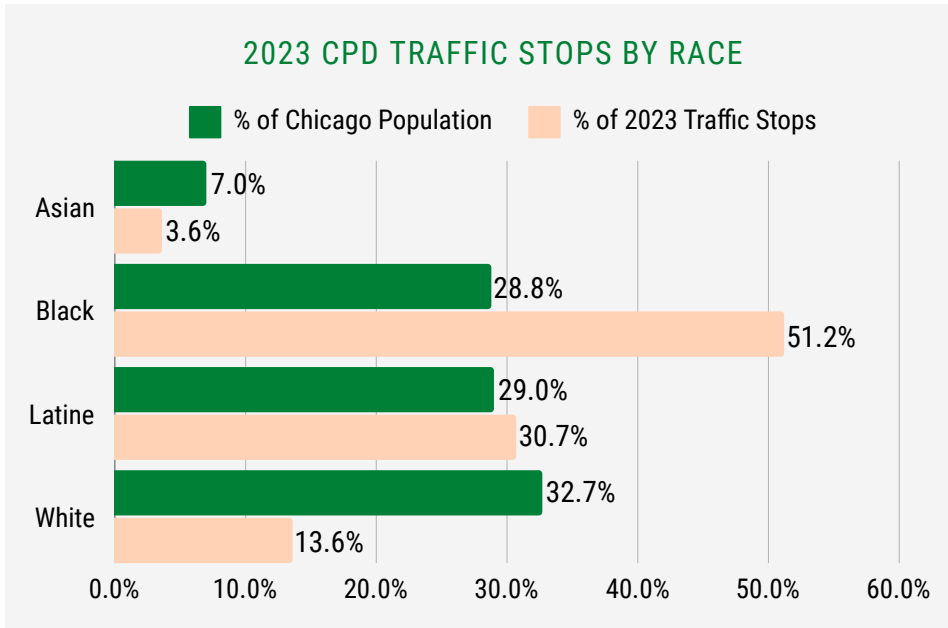


TWO CATEGORIES OF MINOR OFFENSES REPRESENTED NEARLY 70% OF TRAFFIC STOPS

In 2023, just two categories of minor offenses comprised almost 70% of all traffic stops made by CPD—improper or expired registration plates and headlight, taillight, and license plate light offenses. These are offenses that generally are not indications of dangerous driving behavior and can often be used as opportunities for a pretextual stop. Speeding, an offense which can present traffic safety dangers, was the cited reason in only 0.7% of stops.



TRAFFIC STOPS STILL TARGET BLACK AND LATINE DRIVERS

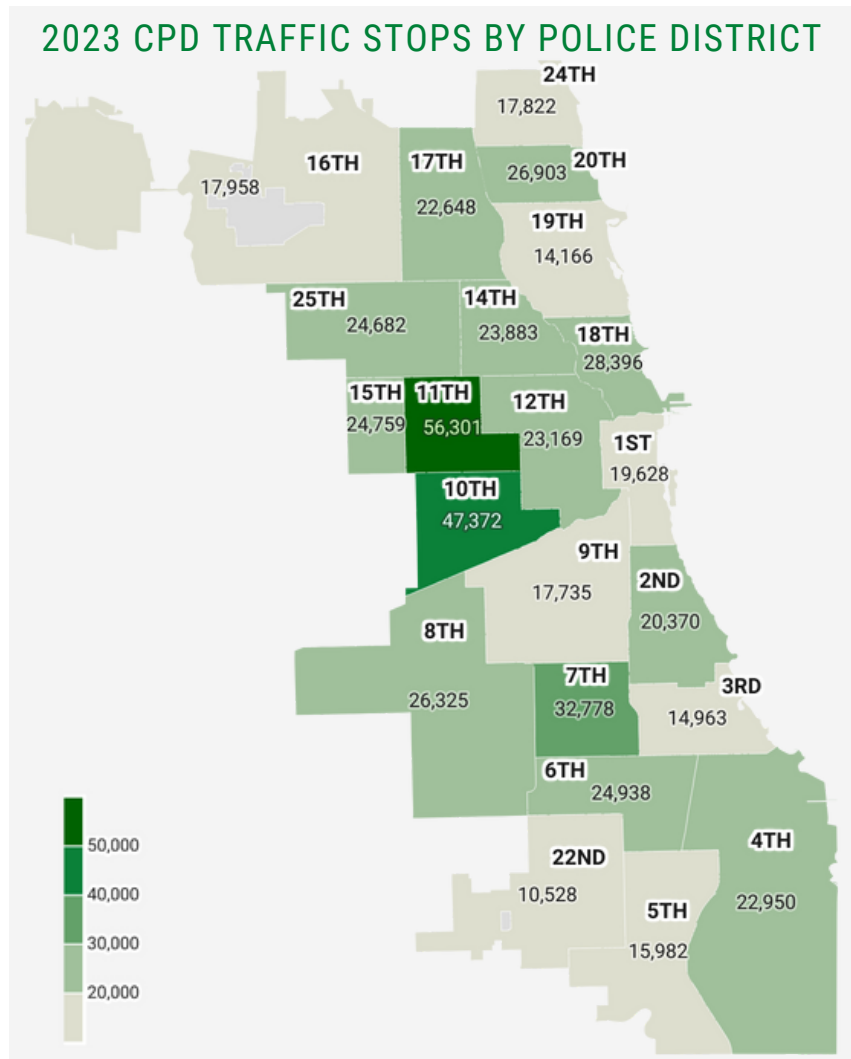


In 2023, Black and Latine Chicagoans continued to be disproportionately stopped while driving. **Black drivers comprised 51.2% of people pulled over despite Black people making up less than 30% of the city’s residents.**¹² Latine drivers were also slightly overrepresented in stop numbers in relation to the Latine population of the city. This stands in stark comparison to stops of white drivers; while over 32% of Chicago’s population is white, just 13.6% of stops were of white drivers.

TRAFFIC STOPS CONTINUE TO BE CONCENTRATED ON CHICAGO’S WEST SIDE

Police District 11, on Chicago’s West Side, had the highest number and percentage of traffic stops—nearly 10.5% of all traffic stops across the city, or a total of 56,301 stops. Neighboring District 10 had the second highest number, making up 8.8% of all stops citywide. These districts are home to the Little Village, North Lawndale, Garfield Park, and Humboldt Park neighborhoods. **Twenty percent of the city’s traffic stops occurred in these two districts, despite being home to only 6.7% of the city’s population.**¹³ Ninety-six percent of Chicagoans living in these districts are Black and Latine.

Conversely, District 19 had about one-fourth of the number of stops as District 11, despite having nearly three times the number of residents. District 19, home to Chicago’s Lincoln Park, Lakeview, and North Center neighborhoods, is 74% white.

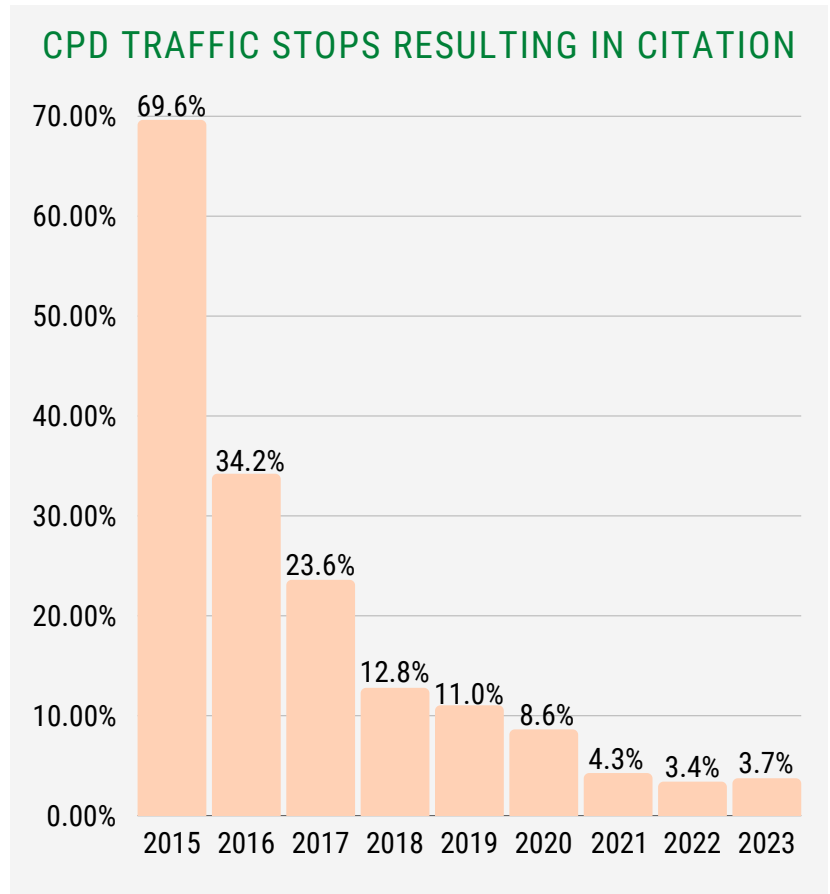


CITATION, ARREST, AND CONTRABAND RECOVERY RATES REMAIN LOW

In 2023, **only 3.7% of all stops resulted in a citation and just 2.2% of all traffic stops resulted in an arrest.** This low citation rate indicates that CPD’s traffic stops are neither responding to dangerous driving activity in most instances, nor are traffic stops effective at uncovering evidence of criminal activity given the low arrest rate that results.

The arrest numbers also show racial disparities. **While around 82% of traffic stops were of Black or Latine drivers, they accounted for almost 92% of traffic stop arrests.** Conversely, while white drivers were 13.6% of those stopped, they were only 5.5% of those arrested from traffic stops.

The minimal contraband recovered from traffic stops underscores the lack of efficacy in CPD’s traffic stop practice and allocation of resources. In 2023 just **0.75% of stops resulted in any contraband recovered at all, including alcohol, drugs, firearms, or other weapons. Just 0.5% of traffic stops, 2,507 total, resulted in recovery of a gun and 0.3% resulted in the discovery of narcotics, 1,767 total.** Those percentages remain largely unchanged from 2022.



2.2%

OF 2023 TRAFFIC STOPS
RESULTED IN AN ARREST

<1%

OF 2023 TRAFFIC STOPS
RESULTED IN RECOVERY OF
CONTRABAND

<1%

OF 2023 TRAFFIC STOPS
RESULTED IN RECOVERY OF
A FIREARM

ANSWERING HOW MANY GUNS TRAFFIC STOPS RECOVER: DIFFICULTIES WITH CPD'S DATA

The numbers clearly show that traffic stops produce a low rate of gun recovery, at less than 1%. However, CPD's poor data collection, storage, and reporting practices make it difficult to determine the exact number of guns that were recovered during traffic stops.

To produce this 2023 Data Report, we submitted three separate FOIA requests for traffic stop data, traffic stop arrest data, and aggregate firearms recovered from traffic stops data. When comparing CPD's responses, we saw contraband numbers that should have aligned but instead varied across datasets. With respect to firearms, we requested the aggregate number of firearms obtained from traffic stops for all of 2022 and 2023. However, the 2022 aggregate firearm numbers we received in response to this request was significantly different from the aggregate firearm numbers we received last year in response to the same request for the same 2022 time period. We originally were told last year that CPD recovered 2,651 firearms in 2022, but in this most recent response we were told they recovered 4,544 firearms in 2022. CPD did not respond to our requests for clarification. For 2023, the aggregate firearm recovery number CPD provided was 4,117 firearms.

We suspect that the numbers CPD provided most recently were higher due to the FOIA office's including both firearms recovered from traffic stops (vehicle stops made for a traffic code violation) and firearms discovered from investigatory stops (vehicle stops made when police have reasonable suspicion the person has committed a non-traffic crime, such as robbery). If true, this is another example of a recent trend we have seen in CPD data and rhetoric of conflating investigatory stops that are made for suspicion of criminal activity with stops made for traffic violations. For example, in prior years we had submitted requests for CPD data on arrests from traffic stops and CPD produced data that included only arrests from stops made for traffic code violations; in January 2024, we again submitted the same FOIA request but this time it appeared CPD may have included arrests stemming from stops for both traffic code violations and investigatory stops. Again, CPD refused our request for clarification.

Due to concerns about the accuracy of the disparate 2022 aggregate numbers we received from CPD with no explanation, the firearms number and rate of recovery that we calculated above for 2023 (2,507 total, 0.5% of stops) are taken from data on contraband recoveries from traffic stops arrests. However, even if using the larger aggregate number of firearms provided by CPD, the ineffectiveness conclusion still stands; if 4,117 firearms were recovered during traffic stops, that still represents only 0.7% of 2023 CPD traffic stops resulting in a gun.

SPOTLIGHT ON CPD SUPERINTENDENT SNELLING'S FIRST QUARTER, Q4 2023

In September 2023, Larry Snelling was appointed as Superintendent of CPD. His supporters positioned him as a change of pace from CPD's prior administration, emphasizing his disagreement with performing mass pretextual traffic stops in Black and Latine communities as a policing strategy. Since appointed, Superintendent Snelling has said he wants to narrow the Department's traffic stops approach to focus on dangerous driving behavior and criminal activity like robberies, shootings, or carjackings. However, this second type of stop—a stop made with reasonable suspicion that the person has committed one of those crimes—would be an investigatory stop, not a traffic stop made for a traffic code violation like the stops described in this report. This report does not examine the data behind or impact of CPD's investigatory stops strategy. The information box on the right side of this page explains more about the importance of the distinction between these two types of stops.

To get a sense of whether Superintendent Snelling's first three months on the job reflected the change in perspective, we isolated traffic stop data from the fourth quarter ("Q4") of 2023.

So far, Superintendent Snelling's Department has showed more of the same—high numbers of minor stops of disproportionately Black and Latine drivers with low citation, arrest, and contraband recovery rates. Notable changes include a small decrease in stop numbers compared to other quarters but a slightly increased concentration in West Side districts and a higher rate of stops for registration plate offenses.



Q4 STOP NUMBERS DECREASED SLIGHTLY BUT REMAINED HIGH.

There were 118,811 stops in Q4—a 4% decrease from the prior quarter and an 11% decrease from Q4 in 2022. Still, this is a high number— it is more traffic stops than CPD made all year in 2015, before CPD began escalating pretextual traffic stops.

ENDING PRETEXTUAL STOPS DOES NOT MEAN ENDING INVESTIGATORY STOPS

Since the beginning of his tenure, Superintendent Snelling has described his traffic stops strategy in a way that encompasses both traffic stops made for traffic code violations without suspicion of a crime (which includes pretextual stops) and vehicle investigatory stops made for reasonable suspicion of criminal activity. We also saw evidence of this conflation in CPD's FOIA responses, discussed above in the "Answering How Many Guns Traffic Stops Recover" section.

But lumping these two stop types together under one traffic stops strategy makes it seem as if ending ineffective pretextual stops would preclude CPD from stopping *any* person in a car, thereby preventing CPD from using investigatory stops to respond to crimes. That is not true.

The data described in this report shows that making large numbers of minor traffic stops, the majority of which appear to be pretextual, is a waste of resources that results in targeted harm in Chicago's communities of color and produces very little evidence of crime. Stopping this waste of resources by ending pretextual traffic stops in Chicago would have no impact on CPD's ability to use investigatory stops to address robberies, shootings, carjackings, and other crimes.

To learn more about how Chicago can end pretextual traffic stops, you can find the Free2Move Coalition's Policy Platform at www.free2movechi.org.



LICENSING OR REGISTRATION VIOLATION STOPS INCREASED IN Q4.

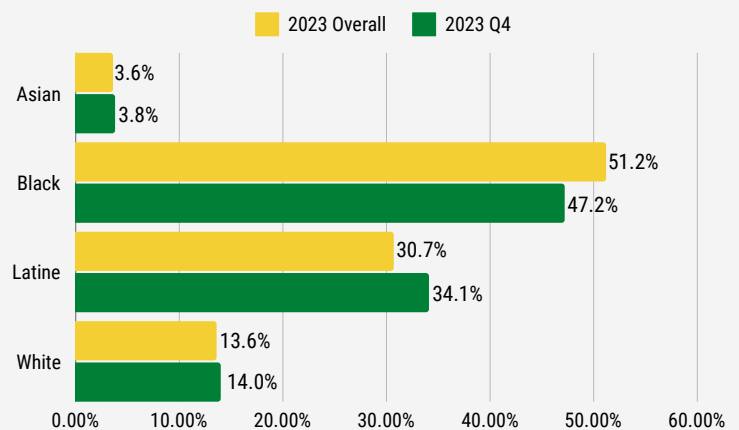
Licensing or registration offenses in Q4 represented an even greater share of the stops than in 2023 overall. These traffic stops **comprised 48.7% of all stops during this period**. Moving violation stops represented a smaller share than 2023 overall, at only 24.6%. When looking at specific offenses, stops for improper or expired registration plates were 48.5% of all stops. Stops for broken or unlit headlights, taillights, or license plate lights were 22.8% of all stops. **Speeding comprised less than one percent (0.43%) of stops during Q4.**



BLACK AND LATINE DRIVERS WERE STILL DISPROPORTIONATELY STOPPED, WITH LATINE DRIVERS FACING AN INCREASE IN Q4.

As with 2023 overall, around 81% of all stops in Q4 were of Black and Latine drivers. However, the proportion of Black drivers stopped went slightly down (51.2% for 2023 overall and 47.2% for Q4). Meanwhile, the proportion of Latine drivers went slightly up (30.7% for 2023 overall and 34.1% for Q4).

2023 Q4 STOPPED DRIVERS BY RACE VS. 2023 OVERALL



TRAFFIC STOPS DURING Q4 CONTINUED TO BE CONCENTRATED ON THE WEST SIDE, AND INCREASED.

Q4 stops were more concentrated in West Side Police Districts 10 and 11 than they were during the entirety of 2023. Combined, these districts made up the location of almost 22% of all traffic stops citywide during this quarter. That's slightly higher than 2023 overall, which was 19.3%.



CITATION, ARREST, AND CONTRABAND RECOVERY RATES REMAINED LOW IN Q4.

Traffic stops rarely resulted in a citation, an arrest, or recovery of contraband. Q4 rates were comparable with 2023 overall: 4.2% of traffic stops resulted in citation, 2.5% of traffic stops resulted in arrest, 0.8% of traffic stops resulted in contraband recovery, and 0.5% of traffic stops resulted in recovery of a firearm.

Overall, the 2023 Q4 numbers show some adjustment but generally indicate more of the same practice of making excessive traffic stops for minor traffic violations that target Black and Latine drivers and communities and do not keep our roads or communities safer. **The vast majority of Q4 stops were not made for offenses indicating dangerous driving behavior and the stops did not produce evidence of criminal activity.** While this Q4 data only accounts for the Superintendent's first three months in the role, if Superintendent Snelling is serious about pulling back on CPD's strategy of pretextual traffic stops and instead focusing on risks to traffic or public safety, his first quarter numbers show he has a long way to go.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For our analysis of traffic stops from 2004-2022, see our reports *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk"* and *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk": Update*. Impact for Equity and the Free2Move Coalition, *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk": The Scope, Impact, and Inequities of Traffic Stops in Chicago* (March 2023) <https://www.impactforequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/A-New-Vehicle-for-Stop-and-Frisk-Report.pdf>; Impact for Equity and the Free2Move Coalition, *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk": Update*, (May 2023) https://www.impactforequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IFE_Traffic-Stop-Report-Update_F.pdf.
- 2 The traffic stops data in this report was obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Chicago Police Department. Data on the number, type, and location of stops, driver race, and citation rate came from a dataset of 2023 traffic stops reported by CPD to the Illinois Traffic and Pedestrian Stop Study (ITPSS). The ITPSS requires CPD to collect and annually report data to the state on all traffic stops made for a traffic code violation. Data on traffic stop arrests and contraband recovery comes from a dataset of 2023 traffic stop arrests, comprised of all 2023 adult arrests that have at least one FBI Code 'TRF' or DUI charge or are associated with an arrest that includes one of those charges. This data shows the arrestee's race and offenses charged as well as whether there was drugs, a firearm, or other contraband inventoried as a result of the arrest.
- 3 In 2015, CPD's traffic stop practices increased sharply. That same year, a settlement with the ACLU required CPD to lessen the racially disparate impact of its "stop and frisk" practices. Although officers may have been deterred from misuse of "stop and frisk" under this new scrutiny, they could effectively continue this practice by stopping drivers under the pretext of a traffic code violation. See *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk"*, *supra* note 1, at 9.
- 4 For a deeper discussion of what pretextual stops are, see our report *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk"*, *supra* note 1, at 9.
- 5 Evidence shows these types of minor stops do not contribute to traffic crashes. Center for Policing Equity, *Factsheet: Which Stops Impact Serious Crashes*, <https://policingequity.org/traffic-safety/79-factsheet-which-stops-impact-serious-crashes/file> (finding defects in headlights, signal lights, windshield wipers, mirrors, and car windows contributed to only 0.002% of all fatal crashes nationwide from 2017-2021); Memorandum from Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Advisory Board to Logistics Subcommittee, Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force, re: "Evaluation and Recommendations of a Primary and Secondary Traffic Enforcement System," February 4, 2021, <http://perma.cc/9DLL-H98G> (finding defective lighting accounted for 9.4% of traffic stops in Connecticut but was identified as a contributing factor in <0.1% of accidents).
- 6 Hilary Rau, Scarlet Neath, Maya McDoom, and Charlotte Resing, *Redesigning Public Safety: Traffic Safety*, Center for Policing Equity, p. 4 (Sept. 2022) <https://policingequity.org/traffic-safety/60-cpe-white-paper-traffic-safety/file>.
- 7 See *A New Vehicle for "Stop and Frisk"*, *supra* note 1, at 10-12 (finding over 50% of CPD stops were for minor violations like having an unlit or broken head or tail light or failure to have valid or properly displayed registration plates or tags while only 1.7% of stops were for speeding and 0.19% were for reckless driving or driving under the influence). See also 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) (finding that deprioritizing minor equipment and administrative infractions and prioritizing dangerous driving infractions led to decrease in traffic crashes).
- 8 Pascal Sabino, *911 Calls On South, West Sides Ignored While 'Rapid Response' Cops Make Traffic Stops Instead*, Block Club Chicago (Feb. 15, 2024) <https://blockclubchicago.org/2024/02/15/911-calls-on-south-west-sides-ignored-while-rapid-response-cops-make-traffic-stops-instead/>.
- 9 See, e.g., William Cai, et al., *Measuring racial and ethnic disparities in traffic enforcement with large-scale telematics data*, PNAS Nexus, Volume 1, Issue 4, pg. 144 (Sept. 2022); Emma Pierson, et. al, *A large-scale analysis of racial disparities in police stops across the United States*, 4 *Nature Human Behaviour* 7, 736-745 (2020); Frank R. Baumgartner et al., *Racial Disparities in Traffic Stop Outcomes*, 9 *Duke Forum for Law & Social Change* 21-53 (2017).
- 10 See, e.g., Libby Doyle and Susan Nembhard, *Police Traffic Stops Have Little to Do with Public Safety*, Urban Institute (Apr. 26, 2021) <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/police-traffic-stops-have-little-do-public-safety>; Frank R. Baumgartner, Derek A. Epp and Kelsey Shoub, *Suspect Citizens: What 20 Million Traffic Stops Tell Us About Policing and Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jennifer Fratello, Andrés F. Rengifo, and Jennifer Trone, *Coming of Age with Stop and Frisk: Experiences, Self-Perceptions, and Public Safety Implications*, Vera Institute of Justice (Sept. 2013) <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/stop-and-frisk-summary-report-v2.pdf>.
- 11 The offense categories in this table are just a subset of the nearly 700 different traffic offenses that drivers were stopped for in 2023. The categories represent groupings of common offenses that are the same or similar. This particular subset was chosen as a sample because they either represent a large portion of traffic stops made or are commonly mentioned in public conversation about what traffic stops police should or should not be performing.

ENDNOTES (CONTINUED)

12 The citywide population data in this section was sourced from population estimates for Chicago published in the U.S. Census Quick Facts. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts: Chicago, Illinois, Population Estimates as of July 1, 2023 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chicagocityillinois/PST045223#PST045223> (last visited March 8, 2024).

13 The police district population data in this section was sourced from the police district population estimates in the report, City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, Report on Race- and Ethnicity-Based Disparities in the Chicago Police Department's Use of Force, Appendix A (March 2022), <https://igchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Use-of-Force-Disparities-Report.pdf>.

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 work of the Coalition began in 2021 when a few community and advocacy organizations rallied around alarming issues with Chicago's current traffic safety system. 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 the data, findings, and recommendations visit www.Free2MoveChi.org.