



An LMPD officer conducts a traffic stop near 28th and West Market in Louisville on Feb. 3. MATT STONE/COURIER JOURNAL

# PROACTIVE POLICING

He calls it proactive policing. Early in his tenure as Louisville Metro police chief, Paul Humphrey said he wanted officers to be self-starters — making more traffic and pedestrian stops and increasing overall contact with Louisvillians.

His patrol officers appear to have heard him.

By Oct. 22 of last year, LMPD had conducted approximately 23,500 traffic stops, according to a Courier Journal analysis of Metro government data, surpassing 2024's total of 21,475 stops with two months still remaining. More than two dozen neighborhoods saw triple-digit increases.

Not surprisingly, officers also searched more vehicles, issued more citations and made more arrests, recovering more firearms than during the same period in 2024.

The increase in self-initiated activity — police work not generated by 911 calls — coincides with a drop in violent crime across Louisville. Humphrey has cited those declines as evidence that the department's crime strategy is working.

But some question whether increased traffic enforcement is the right approach.

The Courier Journal's analysis found that a growing share of stops in 2025 stemmed from equipment violations, including expired registration tags, tinted windows and broken headlights or taillights. Through Oct. 22, officers made 69% more equipment stops than during the same period in 2024.

Some experts argue that such stops may have more to do with policing poverty than improving safety.

Meanwhile, racial disparities among stops, identified as an issue by the U.S. Department of Justice in its 2023 investigation into the department, appear to have widened.

Louisville NAACP President Raymond Burse said the disparities suggest little has changed since the Justice Department intervened.

"Looking at the numbers, from my perspective, I don't see

LMPD is stopping drivers a lot more often. Here's where — and why



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any real change," Burse said.

## Surging stops, community trust

The data largely supports Burse's assessment; officers searched more drivers, but outcomes, including racial disparities, changed little.

By Oct. 22 of last year, officers had searched nearly 12% of the vehicles they stopped, compared with nearly 8% during the same period in 2024.

Officers were searching more drivers, but they were not finding contraband much more often.

The "hit rate" — the share of searches that uncovered contraband such as drugs, alcohol or weapons — rose slightly from about 50% to 52%. The rate at which officers recovered firearms also increased modestly, from 18.9% to 19.7%.

But those stops and searches continued to fall disproportionately on Black drivers.

Compared with Louisville's residential population, Black drivers were stopped 2.8 times as often as white drivers, searched roughly 5.5 times as often, cited 2.2 times as often, issued equipment violation citations 3.2 times as often and arrested about 4 times as often.

Some of those disparities exceed those cited in the Justice Department report, which analyzed traffic-stop data from 2016 through 2021.

Like the Justice Department, The Courier Journal excluded interstate highway stops from its analysis because commuters and drivers from other areas may give the interstate driving population a different racial composition than the local residential population.

In a lengthy interview, LMPD Deputy Chief Emily McKinley did not dispute the disparities but said they do not necessarily indicate biased policing. (Chief Humphrey was unavailable for an interview due to scheduled in-service training.)

Police activity, McKinley said, tends to concentrate in areas with the highest crime

and victimization rates.

"Crime is disparate throughout a community, so policing strategies and policing activity are going to reflect that," McKinley said. "You cannot look at population data and expect policing data to mirror that."

She added that stop data should also be analyzed using factors such as location, time of day, driver age and reason for the stop — analysis that McKinley said the department can now conduct through a contract with an analytics company.

Earlier in 2025, Metro officials hired Sigma Squared to help monitor officer interactions for potential bias. McKinley said LMPD plans to release a detailed traffic-stop analysis in its annual report expected in March.

Later in the interview, McKinley said disparities in crime and policing reflect broader systemic inequities.

"Whether that's education, jobs, housing, food security or any sort of economic instability that we see that's unevenly distributed throughout society here in America ... that contributes to the inequality in the crime statistics that we're seeing," she said.

"We can acknowledge those root causes, but we cannot ignore that these are real people being hurt," McKinley said. "These are real neighborhoods that are experiencing that trauma and that hurt. And it's our job to make sure that we protect that and we are finding ways to address that."

Burse said he appreciates that acknowledgment but questions whether stop-heavy policing builds positive relationships with the community.

"Surging and making stops for minor violations, or those kinds of things, doesn't necessarily build trust," Burse said.

In a statement, Mayor Craig Greenberg expressed his support for LMPD's use of "evidence-based strategies to put resources exactly where they're needed," citing double-digit decreases in shootings and homicides across the city.