

Best Practices for Vehicle Pursuit Policies

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Pursuits Are Costly to Taxpayers

- From 2017–2022, local governments & insurers paid more than **\$80 million** in pursuit-related settlement & judgments

CRIME

Milwaukee on track to approve \$375,000 settlement for man injured in police chase

David Clarey Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Sept. 16, 2025, 10:00 a.m. CT

Roadmap/Preview

- 01** National Data on Pursuits
- 02** Pursuit Alternatives
- 03** Best Practices (and Red Flags)
- 04** Data on dep't policy changes
- 05** State of Reform

National Data on Pursuits

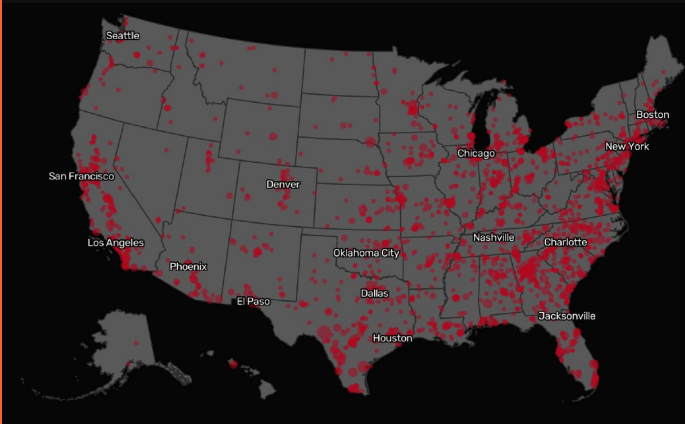
The Danger of Pursuits

- Over **3,300 pursuit fatalities** from 2017-2022 (more than 550 bystanders)
- More than **52,000 injured** from 2017-2021
- Bystanders account for **21 percent** of all pursuit injuries.
- Over **80 percent** of deaths from traffic infractions, nonviolent crimes or no crime at all

Where police chases killed people

From 2017 through 2022, at least 3,336 people died in police chases. Zoom in or choose a state in the map below to see more details.

Zoom to a state...

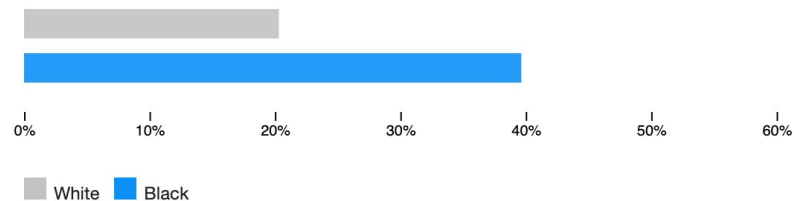


SF Chronicle

Racial Disparities

- Black people **four times more likely** to be killed than white people (*SF Chronicle*)
- Black drivers **more than twice as likely** as white drivers to be pursued for minor violations or nonviolent offenses (*USA Today*)

Share of pursuits initiated by minor offenses, by suspect's race



SOURCE National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; USA TODAY research

Pursuit Alternatives

No *pursuit* doesn't mean no *accountability*

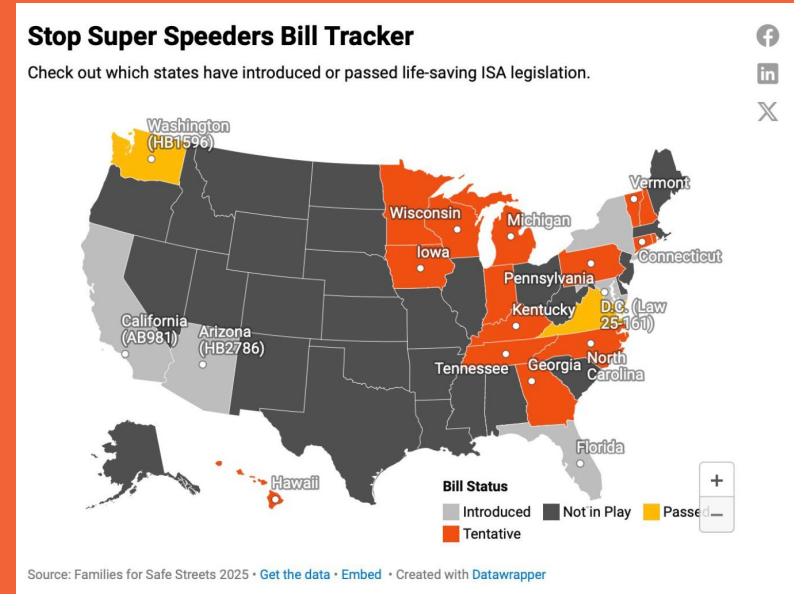
Pursuit Alternatives, Part

- StarChase
- OnStar
- Automated License Plate Readers
- Tire-deflation devices



Pursuit Alternatives, Part Two

- Intelligent speed assist (ISA)
 - Legislation or ordinance passed in VA, WA, DC.
 - Pending WI state bill requiring ISA for repeat reckless drivers.
- Drivers not pursued still criminally liable for fleeing police



Best Practices for Agency Pursuit Policies

Best Practices, Part 1

Define pursuit correctly: not a pursuit to briefly follow a vehicle to get license plate info if (a) substantially obey traffic laws and (b) briefly following doesn't increase risk driver or officer poses to public.

Best Practices, Part 2

Allow pursuits **only** when each of these conditions satisfied:

1. Probable cause of a violent crime (or subset of violent crimes) or, in *rare* cases, OWI/reckless driving
2. Substantial risk of serious injury if suspect not immediately apprehended
3. Apprehension can't be safely accomplished later
4. Safety risks of not apprehending > safety risks of pursuit

Red Flags to Avoid in Agency Pursuit Policies

Red Flags to Avoid

- Banning pursuits entirely
- Generally permitting pursuits for reckless driving
- Allowing chases for fleeing police, or recklessly driving when fleeing police

For example, allowing officers to initiate pursuits for reckless driving will increase the number of vehicle pursuits, which in turn will increase the numbers of injuries and deaths to suspects, officers, and bystanders. The Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department serves as a real-world example. Following revisions to the agency's policy allowing pursuits for reckless driving and vehicle-based drug dealing, pursuits increased sharply from 369 in 2017 to 940 in 2018.¹⁶⁸ Pursuits for reckless driving, which represented 67 percent of all pursuits in 2018, were the primary reason for the increase. Pursuit-related injuries—to suspects, officers, and third parties—also increased significantly, by at least 200 percent.¹⁶⁹

168. City of Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission, *2018 City of Milwaukee*.

169. City of Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission, *2018 City of Milwaukee*. For more details on this case study, see chapter 1 of this guide.

More data!

More data! What happen when agencies change policies

- Policing Project Roanoke study: **restrictive pursuit policies do not increase crime + increase arrests for violent crimes.**
- After Little Rock relaxed chase policy, pursuit-related crashes went from **low of 6 in 2016 to 32 in 2020.**
- After instituting restrictive chase policy, pursuits in Louisville **dropped from 57 in 2012 to only 37 in the next two years** combined.

State of Legislative and Agency-Level Reform

The State of Reform – Restrictive Pursuit Policies

- Hawai'i Act 210
- Other state/jurisdiction-wide regulation: New Jersey & D.C.
- Many of largest agencies, including Michigan State Police, Boise, Boston, Detroit, Miami, and New Orleans.

Legislature 2025

Tired Of Waiting For Rules On Police Chases, Lawmakers Step In

NJ attorney general revises vehicle pursuit policy

NOPD tightens pursuit policy in push to clear federal oversight

NYPD

- Prohibits pursuits for **all traffic violations**; pursuits only allowed for the **most serious & violent** crimes.
- NYPD Commissioner: “The advanced tools of modern-day policing make it possible to apprehend criminals more safely and effectively than ever before, making many pursuits unnecessary.”

The New York Times

N.Y.P.D. Bans High-Speed Chases for Low-Level Offenses

A quarter of the nearly 2,300 vehicle pursuits last year led to crashes, property damage or physical harm, the police said. Most chases will no longer be allowed.



Thank You

website: policingproject.org

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