
Who gets stopped by the police?

Interpretations vary about what newly released local data says about race and policing

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM

Rappahannock News Staff

Early public data from the Virginia State Police published for the first time this year reveal new insights into traffic stops conducted by the commonwealth's law enforcement. An initial analysis of more than 440,000 records collected over the past nine months show that Black

motorists in Virginia are stopped at a higher rate than White motorists and are also more likely to be subjected to vehicle searches.

Passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2020, the Community Policing Act requires local and state police officers to record all traffic

See **POLICE**, Page 16

POLICE

From Page 1

stops, not just those that result in an enforcement action like a citation or arrest. In July of last year, officers began reporting the age, gender, race (American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, White and Unknown) and ethnicity (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) of every individual stopped; the reason for the stop; whether the stop resulted in a citation, warning or arrest; and whether the vehicle was searched.

According to 2019 U.S. census estimates, about 61 percent of the Virginia population self-identified as non-Hispanic White. Yet non-Hispanic Whites accounted for only 52 percent of traffic stops. By contrast, Black individuals made up less than 20 percent of the state's population according to census data but accounted for 30 percent of stops during the nine month collection period. "I personally wasn't surprised by these statistics at all," said Dr. Uziah Harris, president of the Culpeper branch of the NAACP. "If you look at it on the surface, you'll say, well, 52 percent is much greater than 31 percent. It is. But when you factor in the percentage of the population, what you have is a situation where people are disproportionately stopped. And it seems to fall on racial lines."

Hispanic drivers were more likely than non-Hispanic drivers to be pulled over in Virginia, accounting for 14 percent of traffic stops even though they make up nine percent of the population.

Drivers who were identified as Asian and Pacific Islander were the least likely to be pulled over, making up only two percent of stops despite being seven percent of Virginia's overall population.

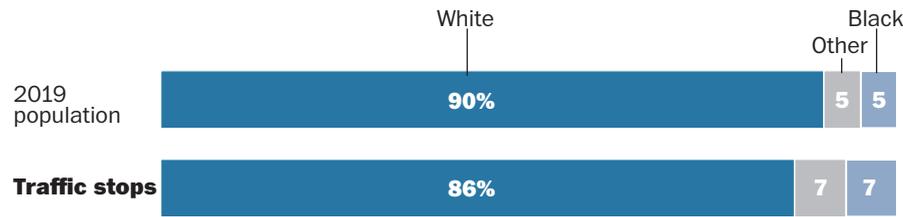
The Community Policing Act, sponsored chiefly by Del. Luke Torian, D-Manassas, was intended to help monitor and curb racial bias in law enforcement. By law, Virginia's Department of Criminal Justice Services is tasked with producing an official annual analysis of the data. The first report was due on July 2, but has yet to be published.

"Evidence of bias-based policing in national and some state-based data is clear," said Gianna DeJoy, Del. Torian's director of communications. "However, police officers in Virginia were not previously required to report the race, ethnicity, or gender of drivers during traffic stops, meaning that type of data did not exist to be studied or reported out in the Commonwealth." The Community Policing Act is meant to remedy that lack of data while deterring bias-based policing and fostering trust between our police and communities through added transparency. The initial data seemed to reinforce what had already been suspected: Minority Virginians are disproportionately over-policed. However, we still await a full analysis of this early data from DCJS. That will provide us with a fuller picture and allow us to begin thinking about next steps."

Ryan Ruzic, a public defender based in Warrenton, said the new data could improve not just policing, but also the

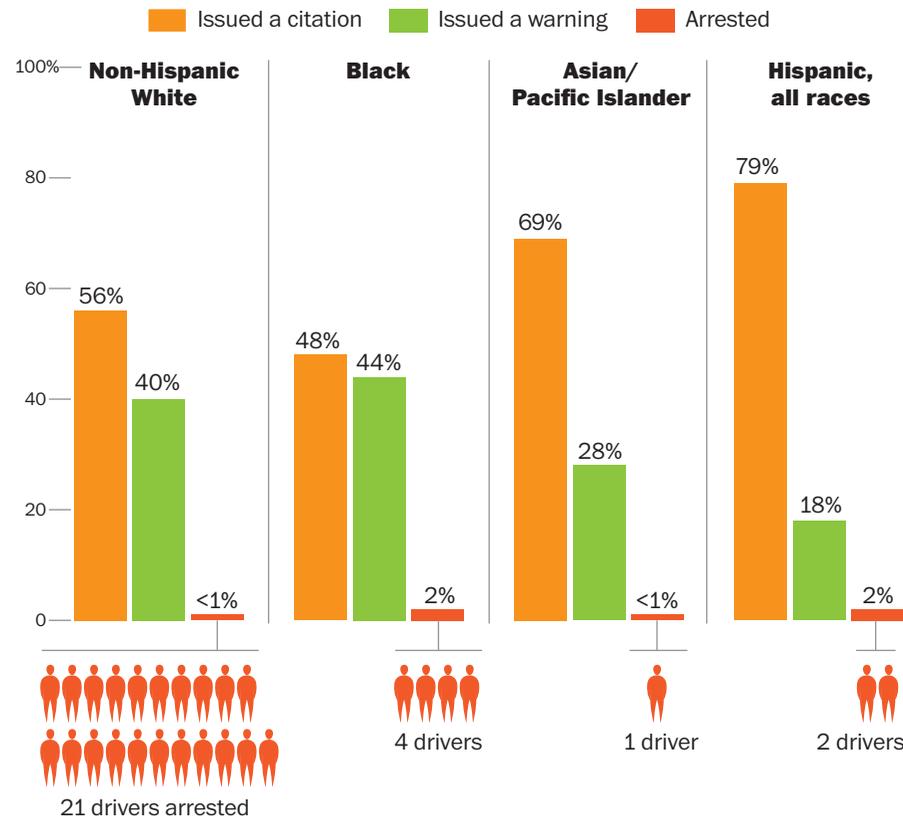
Rappahannock County traffic stop statistics

From July 2020 through April 2021, there were 2,354 traffic stops in Rappahannock County. Data include stops by both the Rappahannock County Sheriff's Office and the Virginia State Police.



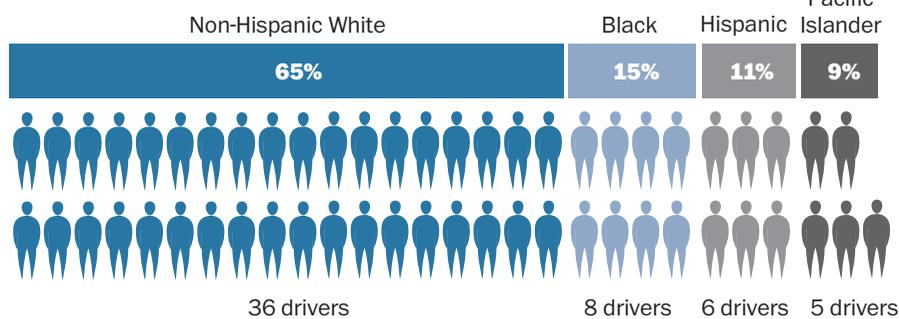
Traffic stop outcomes

Breakdown of traffic stop results, among the drivers in each group:



Traffic searches

Of the 55 people who were searched...



Sources: Community Policing Act

By Laura Stanton for Foothills Forum

On a local level, it is more difficult to interpret the traffic stop data consolidated from local sheriff's offices, the Virginia State Police and the Department of Wildlife Services. In a compilation of fewer records, each single record carries more statistical weight, making it difficult to draw reliable conclusions about how Rappahannock County stacks up.

criminal justice system as a whole. "Statistics don't often directly come into a court case, but when we can

see from the statistics [that] there's some kind of systemic issue, or could be some kind of systemic issue, then

it lets us look at, well, why did the things in this particular case happen that way? It can kind of key-in the defense attorney like myself, or the prosecutors, or the court, that an individual incident can't be looked at in the vacuum that we typically look at it in," he said.

On a local level, it is more difficult to interpret the traffic stop data consolidated from local sheriff's offices, the Virginia State Police and the Department of Wildlife Services. In a compilation of fewer records, each single record carries more statistical weight, making it difficult to draw reliable conclusions about how Rappahannock County stacks up. Plus, this early data was collected during a highly atypical pandemic year, when driving behaviors — and policing behaviors — likely changed relative to pre-pandemic patterns. For example, Rappahannock County Sheriff Connie Compton said that for some time during the COVID-19 crisis officers were not making any traffic stops at all. Another potential issue with the data is that race and ethnicity estimates from the census are based on self-reported records, while race and ethnicity data from the Community Policing Act are reported by the officers themselves.

But the local data share some trends with the state data. For instance, according to U.S. census data estimates from 2019, roughly 8 percent of the people in Rappahannock and its five neighboring counties identified as Black. Yet, Black motorists accounted for 13 percent of traffic stops. Non-Hispanic White residents, who made up 80 percent of the region's population, accounted for 69 percent of traffic stops. Black residents were also searched at a higher rate than Whites.

To a degree, the trend continued to the county level. While less than 5 percent of people in Rappahannock County identified as Black, 7 percent of individuals stopped by law enforcement were Black. And non-Hispanic Whites, who made up close to 90 percent of Rappahannock residents, accounted for only 86 percent of all traffic stops. Of the 55 people who were searched, 36 were non-Hispanic White, 8 were Black, 6 were Hispanic, and 5 were Asian/Pacific Islander.

"I think most of these tickets are people [from] out of the county that are traveling through here, these are not people that live in the county," said Sheriff Compton. "The people that drive through here, if they're speeding, and we catch them, we write them. It doesn't matter what you are. You know, to me this doesn't do any good. You know, if you're violating the law, you're violating the law. I don't care what color you are, what gender you are, your nationality or anything else."

Compton said that documenting this data takes precious time away from officers doing their jobs in the field and administrators in the office. "To me this is just more time to have to get these numbers ... It takes extra time on the traffic stop, you have to fill the forms out and make sure you turn it in — ➔

➔ it's just something to create more paper trail. And to me, it doesn't prove anything."

Rather than look at stop rates, Compton looks at the results of the stop to determine bias. "If you look at traffic stop results of non-Hispanic White drivers who were stopped, 63 percent [received a citation]. Of Black drivers who were stopped, 60 percent. Of Asians and Pacific Islanders, 61 [percent], and Hispanic drivers were 67 percent, so it's all right there. The ranges are ... right there together."

But Dr. Harris at the NAACP looks at the data differently. "I think when I looked at your demographics in Rappahannock, I saw 5 percent of the population is Black, but when you look at the stoppage rate, it was 7 percent. So you routinely see that people of color are being stopped over their percentage of the population, whereas interaction with police if you are non-Hispanic White is either at your percentage of population or in some cases below," Harris said. "And so I think the next set of conversations have to revolve around, okay, what do you do with that data, right?"

"There shouldn't be any bias in policing," Compton said. On that point, Compton and Harris agree.

"Now that we can clearly see that there is a difference as it relates to stoppage, that there is a difference as it relates to searches, as we can see those differences, the question then becomes: What do we do about that?"

What kind of policy changes can be made so that these types of disparities can be lessened? Incentivizing great policing," Harris said.

Harris suggested that great policing looks like dialogue with the community, transparency in policing and hiring practices, a willingness to build relationships, and, in instances where officers make an arrest or use force, a commitment to documenting the interaction in a way the community can understand. "I think when you do those things, then what you create, naturally, is a policy where even if I disagree, I know that the law enforcement entity involved has our, as a community, best interests at heart because the process is open."

Until now, it has not been mandatory in Virginia for law enforcement officers to publicly report use of force. Beginning July 1, 2021, the Community Policing Act requires law enforcement officers to report whether they used physical force against a detained person, whether the person used physical force against the officer, and whether the person who was stopped spoke English.

"Let's reward great officers," Harris said. "And there are more great officers than poor officers. But at the same time, let's be done with law enforcement officials who are unable to, at the very least, make a good effort in putting biases in check, and really putting their best foot forward in terms of serving the community."



SEE YOUR COOPERATIVE IN A NEW LIGHT

Your cooperative is sharpening its focus on serving you and the community. From even more reliable, affordable power, to a clear vision for broadband in the area, REC and members have a very bright future.

Take a fresh look and see your cooperative in a whole new light.



WE HAVE BIG NEWS!

RappCats is now an official partner in the **Best Friends Animal Sanctuary Network**.

RappCats is hosting an Open House this weekend, along with thousands of shelters across America!

NATIONAL ADOPTION OPEN HOUSE

Fri, July 9th – Sun, July 11th

Call us at **540-987-6050** - we'll reserve a tour of our shelter just for you. It's your chance to have a private "meet & greet" with the RappCats.

Thank you for your support! We rely entirely on donations and volunteers. Our cats depend on you!

rappcats.org | 540.987.6050
adopt@rappcats.org



Committee to investigate emergency dispatch errors

Technology snafus scramble
which companies should be
first on the scene

BY RACHEL NEEDHAMV
Rappahannock News Staff

Public safety officials have convened a committee that will meet for the first time tonight (Thursday) to investigate a serious error discovered in the county's emergency 9-1-1 dispatch system last week.

On Tuesday, Feb. 23, Todd Brown, chief of Chester Gap Volunteer Fire & Rescue, noticed something was off. By mid-week, the Chair of the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors had written a memorandum to Sheriff Connie Compton that began: "Sheriff Compton, I need your help."

See **DISPATCH**, Page 18

2020 was second largest bear harvest on record in Va.

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

For the second year in a row, hunters in Virginia have harvested a record number of black bears, according to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). For several decades, the department has tracked annual deer, bear and turkey kills and recorded each animal's sex, date of kill, weapon used and location.

Rappahannock County hunters reported 23 bears harvested this winter, contributing to the second-largest statewide bear harvest since the DWR (previously the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries) began keeping records in 1928. Across the state, hunters reported harvesting 3,464 animals during this year's bear season, which lasted from Oct. 3, 2020 to Jan. 2, 2021. The DWR estimates that

57% of those bears were taken by hunters using hounds.

"The 2020-21 bear harvest was approximately 2% lower than the previous year's record harvest; however, as the second highest harvest on record, it was still 24% higher than the previous 5-year average during 2015-2019," the DWR reports on its website.

During the 2019-20 season, hunters reported harvesting more than 3,500 animals.

The DWR says that the primary reason that hunters have been so successful over the past two seasons could be that the department expanded firearms hunting opportunities and increased "recreational opportunities in areas with expanding bear populations."

"As part of our bear management plan... in about 50 counties we changed the objective from stabilizing bear

numbers to reducing bear numbers," says David Kocka, district wildlife biologist for the DWR. Kocka said that as part of an effort to reach that new goal, in some counties in Northern Virginia and on both sides of the Blue Ridge the department implemented a three-day early season before the regular bow-hunting season opened.

The season during the winter of 2020-21 was also the second during which hunters could report their kills through the DWR's electronic harvest reporting system over the internet with a computer or a phone app.

As for the white-tailed deer harvest, Rappahannock County hunters took home approximately 1,848 deer: 783 antlered males, 101 male fawns and 964 females.

Statewide, hunters took home 208,131 deer, up slightly from the

206,976 that were harvested in the winter of 2019-20. "Archery hunters took 14% of the total deer harvest while muzzleloading deer hunters and firearms hunters took 24% and 63% of the total harvest, respectively," the DWR says.

Bear and deer harvests are essential to meeting the state's goals for wildlife populations and habitat.

DWR Deer Project Leader Matt Knox explains: "Where hunters have access to deer, they control the deer numbers. A lot of people think we're trying to produce more and more deer for deer hunters but it's actually just the opposite, we're trying to control the deer numbers for all citizens, for hunters and non-hunters."

The Spring Youth Hunt for the 2021 turkey season will be over the weekend of Apr. 3-4. Spring Turkey season begins Apr. 11 and ends May 16.

DISPATCH

From Page 1

Chief Brown said that last week he realized his company was not being dispatched to emergency calls in areas where they're usually the first or second to respond. He contacted Chief Dis-

patcher Janie Jenkins, who informed him that her dispatchers had "just realized some of the run areas were all messed up also."

Generally speaking, a fire company is "first due" within the area where it is the closest responder. When a fire company is first due, it means that company is the first to be notified by the 9-1-1 dispatcher that there's an emergency. If the first due fire company does not respond to dispatch within five minutes, a second company is called, and the second company is called "second due." The third is called "third due" and so on.

"What had happened was our first due ended up getting smaller and then our second due went from Huntly Road down to Wakefield School," Brown explained. "And then from Wakefield School all back up in the area of Dearing Road and [Bean Hollow], we went from second due to last due.

So if there would have been an EMS call or a fire call or something at Settle's, just to give you an example, [dispatch] would have called everyone in the county before they called Chester Gap. So that was a big mistake."

In her memorandum to the Sheriff, Supervisor Debbie Donehey wrote: "As another example, a call from Grimsley Road has Chester Gap toned out Fourth Due, which also does not add up, particularly given the current Sixth Due arrangement for Flint Hill-origin calls. To put this in perspective, a call from Grimsley Road would require Chester Gap personnel to travel *through* their Sixth Due area to arrive at Grimsley Road to meet their Fourth Due obligation there."

On the morning of March 2, the Sheriff told the Rappahannock News that Chester Gap's department is now being dispatched on any calls north of Massie's Corner. She said it was the mapping system, not the computer-automated dispatching system, that had somehow changed Chester Gap's dues.

"Right now it's just looking at everything and trying to get everything fixed," Sheriff Compton said. "We refer to the map but the dispatchers also have a book that they're looking



BY RACHEL NEEDHAM

Before the system error, Chester Gap's fire company was second due to call throughout Flint Hill.

Sheriff Compton: "Right now it's just looking at everything and trying to get everything fixed."

in to make sure that the proper people are dispatched."

Chester Gap is currently the only company in the county to have full-time paid emergency responders on staff and is thus uniquely capable of providing fast round-the-clock response. In an interview last month, Brown told the Rappahannock News that his fire and rescue personnel typically respond within three minutes of receiving a tone from dispatch.

Asked how long he believes the error to have persisted, Chief Brown said it couldn't have been more than 30 days. "We just don't know if it was a miscommunication somewhere or if it was misinformation inputted, we don't know. That's the task of this committee, is to find out, okay, how did this happen?" he said.

The committee, composed of Washington firefighter Sean Knick,

Chief Dispatcher Lt. Janie Jenkins, Sheriff Compton, Dispatcher Sandy Carter, Chief Brown and county resident Page Glennie will meet at 5 p.m. at the Washington Fire Company on Thursday, March 4.

"We need to go through this and find out how this happened, number one, and where this mistake came from. Then number two is to fix this mistake so it doesn't happen again because something like this is putting people's lives at risk," Brown said.

"Time is of the essence — if someone is having a heart attack and has to wait 15 minutes before somebody responds when you've got somebody that's closer, that is a big issue. We need to make sure this is corrected properly ... it should have never happened."

"Hopefully the message to the citizens is as soon as we recognized there was a problem, there was immediate action by public safety and immediate action by me to make sure we fix any problem that's out there as quick as possible because we don't want the citizens concerned that they can't trust when they call 9-1-1 that someone will show up," Donehey said.

Inspiring Thoughts
by
Randy Minter



MAUSOLEUM BURIAL

Most mausoleums are located in cemeteries and anyone can choose to be interred in one. Due to a high water table, above-ground burial is the only option in some areas of the world. A mausoleum is a freestanding structure that holds many bodies entombed in caskets, and there is no actual burial process. Mausoleums vary in size, with most providing a protected, indoor environment allowing visitors the opportunity to meditate, visit, or pray while viewing the sealed crypt. An engraved plaque is also placed on the mausoleum front. There are other expenditures associated with a mausoleum burial, such as a casket and embalming costs, and it's typically more expensive than burial. It's best to explore all the costs before deciding.

Planning a funeral service can be a difficult process for families who have just lost a loved one. But it's important to provide those who are grieving with a supportive environment in which they can begin to find closure, say goodbye, and come to terms with the loss. To learn about our services, please call **MOSER FUNERAL HOME** at (540) 347-3431. We invite you to tour our facility, conveniently located at 233 Broadview Ave., Warrenton. We'll also tell you about our **BRIGHT VIEW CEMETERY**, just outside of Warrenton.

"We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world, the company of those who have known suffering."

— Helen Keller

