WEST SIDE
community organization
209 Page Street West, St. Paul, MN,
55107 www.wsco.org

Where Were You This Winter?

1. You have the power of the state. We do not. Federal agents have to follow state and local laws unless it's necessary and proper to break it in the course of carrying out federal law. You have the responsibility to ensure they follow it and to enforce it. You did not. My fellow observers put their lives on the line to protect our communities. Where were you? What if anything will you do differently if/when this happens again?

A: Our number 1 job at the county is to provide services to those who need them, we ensured that we continued to provide services regardless of documentation status through this unprecedented and terrible time. We also focused on the safety and well-being of our staff in order to deliver those services.

Impacts: The following are examples illustrate the ways in which prolonged response and stabilization efforts have put tremendous pressure on county systems and the workforce.

Federal enforcement activity disrupted in-person access and caused increased stress in service centers. Despite these challenges, no services were suspended. Housing and social service systems experienced sustained strain. At last estimate, housing assistance requests were up 59% statewide, with rental assistance more than doubling (increasing 118%).

We also extended time for property tax payment without penalty to help our individuals and businesses that were hurt by the Surge.

2. Why is this meeting happening now? Where were elected city and state officials 3 to 4 months ago? Where was the city when our neighbors stepped up and took vulnerable individuals to school or work? Where was the city when parents and church members were patrolling street corners at schools? Where was the city during food drives? We were there. Where were you?

A: Our observers became the nation's heroes during Operation Metro Surge and some died in the process. I thank the ones I know who helped and in many ways we can never repay the services that people are still doing for the community. I cannot speak to either the city or the state's actions during this time, but I can speak to the county.

In a unanimous vote on February 3, 2026, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners condemned the aggressive tactics used by federal immigration enforcement agents and mourned the loss of life, physical injury and community trauma resulting from the Surge. Commissioners also called for an independent investigation of the "preventable and brutal" killings of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti.

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The board resolution from February 3, 2026, also directed the County Manager to establish a structured and coordinated response to the Surge and take specific steps to address the operational and community impacts of the surge. The County Manager mobilized a Surge Response Core Team to coordinate response efforts, ensure appropriate resourcing, and facilitate effective decision-making.

The county took several steps to manage interactions with federal immigration enforcement and support both residents and employees.

We posted signage at county parks and facilities stating that federal agents cannot use county property for staging or operations without authorization, and that non-public areas marked "employee only" require a valid judicial warrant for entry.

Ramsey County Attorney John Choi collaborated with local law enforcement agencies to create guidance for residents who witness or experience potential misconduct by federal agents, advising them to contact local law enforcement to file reports. This information was shared through trainings, the county website, social media, and community outreach such as the Nyob Zoo Ramsey County program for the Hmong community.

The county also established formal protocols restricting immigration agents from accessing non-public county spaces without a warrant and created employee training on how to handle encounters with immigration enforcement. A total of 425 employees attended these sessions, and additional immigration-related resources were added to the county intranet and a public guidance webpage.

To address increased stress among employees during this period, the county expanded mental health and wellbeing support through the Employee Assistance Program and HR initiatives, including stress-management sessions and the launch of a mobile app to improve access to support resources.

Our policy

3. We are living in extraordinary times that demand more than just status quo. Being the bigger person often means just staying silent. How are YOU actually going to take a stand for our community, our shared humanity?

A: I am thankful for your invitation for me to participate in your event at Humboldt High School. I am sorry I wasn't able to be there but my aide WAS there and his most important work was not to speak but to listen. He shared your powerful stories from a range of different affected individuals. We affirm our resolution and our stand that we took above at Ramsey County.

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Saint Paul Police Department:

1. Why was the Saint Paul Police Chief Axel Henry so silent during the ICE surge?

A: I cannot speak to that as the Police Chief does not report to me. I can speak to the work of the Sheriff's department during this time. The county board asked two things:

   A. The sheriff not cooperate with ICE
   B. The sheriff not advertise this. I was very clear with our team at the time that while making loud public statements denouncing ICE might benefit local politicians, they could very well hurt the victims of ICE and that will always be my first concern.

2. How do we have more accountability from law enforcement to not cooperate with ICE, to respond on behalf of our neighbors when they are needed, to get accountability for illegal actions by ICE?

A: Primarily by getting the truth about what exactly happened in the most controversial situations. The attorney general and our metro county attorneys are asking for this information.

3. There has been increased St. Paul Police activity on the West Side since operation metro surge. How can the community trust that the ICE surge did not lay the groundwork for police action?

A: I cannot speak to this. I do not have the necessary data.

4. How do we regain the trust of our St. Paul police when they did not respond to ICE calls?

A: Only the city of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul police can address this.

Local Government Power:

1. What is something the government in MN can do for families who were under excessive force use by ICE or other abuses by them?

A: Just as members of the public have the right to sue any level of government for abuse or mistreatment, members of the public should be able to sue ICE. Also, I appreciate that the MN Attorney General is prosecuting the murderers of Renee Good and Alex Pretti. That is exactly what he should do. I also appreciate RC Attorney Choi committing to prosecuting ICE officers who break our laws.

2. What authority does the state have to regulate (or ban) the tactics used by federal agents? If the answer is little or none, are there any creative ways to indirectly affect these tactics?

A: That is a great question. In many ways the reason that Minesota became a national example is because we steadily resisted ICE while not creating the civil war

this president wanted. It is worth looking at how to institutionalize this kind of approach, but we don't have the answer now.

Detention:

1. How many Minnesotans are currently in detention facilities domestically and abroad?

A: I don't know. My understanding is that there are 200 to 300 in Minnesota according to MN records. There are, of course, hundreds of others outside the state.

Voter Safety:

1. How are we protecting our people as they go out to vote this fall?

A: Ramsey County Elections are very well administered and always have been. We will fiercely guard our voter information and our voting processes – including early voting – which may be a safer way for people who feel vulnerable to vote.

2. How can we prepare for the midterm elections? In our community? At the polls in our neighborhoods?

A: As I said, we will fiercely ensure that we protect our normal voting processes. I expect that along with our normal polling place staff, there will be election observers – as there have been in other elections to ensure our citizens can vote with harassment or threat.

Other:

1. What kind of interventions can the city/county/state provide to families to address their mental health, especially with no insurance?

A: We recently allocated an additional $75,000 to the Ramsey County Children's Mental Health Collaborative. Funding will be used to strengthen access to mental health and basic needs supports during a time of increased referrals, prolonged service waitlists, and heightened community stress

We are still assessing impacts and working on additional support for our community.

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2. Last year the Boosters requested additional money for security at the cinco de mayo and they were denied funding (for saint paul police). Will there be allocated funds from the city of saint paul for SPPD security this year?

A: I cannot address this question.

3. Are the prosecutions for the Alex Pretti and Renee Good murders moving forward at the state level?

A: That is my understanding and they should.