

2023 Advocacy Priorities

Public Safety

The St. Paul Area Chamber advocates for a measurable year-over-year improvement in both crime statistics and the public perceptions of safety in St. Paul.

The economic vitality of the East Metro region depends on the assurance of public safety in our communities. While the increase in crimes against people and property have been a national trend, the St. Paul Area Chamber believes there are steps that can be taken at the city, county, and state level to increase public confidence in the safety of our communities while promoting better public safety outcomes.

Improving Support for Law Enforcement Personnel

Municipal police forces are on the forefront of public safety outcomes. Ensuring an adequate number of police officers to serve neighborhoods with high crime, business corridors, and entertainment districts will help prevent violence, harassment, vandalism, and other offenses that threaten the vitality of our city. In addition, the City of St. Paul has a responsibility to continue investing in recruiting, training, and retaining law enforcement personnel to carry out their important duties respectfully, professionally, and effectively for the city.

- We support **an increased police presence** in central corridors. The City of St. Paul should prioritize resources towards filling all positions requested by the Chief of Police.
- We encourage the City of St. Paul to **conduct multiple police academies** each year, to better recruit and train a new pipeline of officers.

Public Safety Tools and Programs

Along with needing to increase police presence to prevent and respond to crime in our communities, public safety operations must have the programs and tools they need to support year over year decreases in violent crime, emergency service calls, and encampments.

- We support utilizing targeted **co-responder programs** for mental health and/or substance use issues to be used to supplement police, providing law enforcement the bandwidth to dedicate their time and resources to core policing functions.
- We support **focusing resources on the technological tools** law enforcement needs to properly deter criminal activity and solve crimes (i.e., cameras, communications, gunshot detection technology).

Prosecuting Crime

The judicial system plays a key role in public safety outcomes. Beyond rising crime, East Metro counties are facing additional challenges with increasing jail populations due to COVID-induced court backlogs and a shortage of prosecutors. These overcrowding and backlog issues in turn contribute to a public perception of increasing criminal activity involving juvenile and repeat offenders.

- We believe **County Attorney staffing** should be prioritized, to bring on additional prosecutors to address the backlog of cases, and in turn, the concerns of jail overcrowding.
- Working with other stakeholders, we support legislation that would require County Attorneys and law enforcement to **submit data on felony level offenses that go uncharged** or are not investigated to the Minnesota Sentencing Guideline Commission.

Housing

We support commonsense policies that increase the overall housing stock throughout the East Metro (rental/homeownership, multi/single-family, affordable/workforce/market rate). We believe that there is no singular solution to the housing shortage in our region and that government partners should focus on attracting private housing development, encouraging cross-sector partnerships and reimagining housing policy to reduce cost barriers for developers and consumers.

We recognize that housing policy intersects with nearly every aspect of community living – from public safety and transit to economic security, health, and education – so we encourage business and government partners to increase their awareness of these relationships and consider impact investing to address community needs holistically.

- We actively support **zoning modifications** in jurisdictions throughout the East Metro to ensure that current regulations are solutions to identified problems and do not inhibit other housing production or affordability goals, or unnecessarily increase development or operational costs.
- As part of a coalition, we actively support ongoing efforts to seek **increases in state and local investment to build new housing** across the spectrum, including but not limited to Housing Infrastructure Bonds (HIBs) and Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH).
- We support the development and preservation of affordable housing throughout the region. We **do not, however, support the use of rent control** as a tool to meet the East Metro’s affordable housing needs. We believe that a patchwork of local regulations contributes to investor uncertainty in developing regional housing stock. As such, we encourage the St. Paul City Council to use available data in 2023 to evaluate the effectiveness of rent control as a tool to increase affordable housing and to consider its repeal.
- We **encourage local governments to act as strong development partners** in easing burdens for businesses and residents alike. This includes local investment (and ongoing maintenance) in parks, water, and utility infrastructure, etc. that play a role in development costs and, ultimately, the affordability of housing.

Benefits Cliff

For low-wage workers seeking advancement, the realities of public assistance policies (housing, childcare, medical insurance, etc.) are often an inhibitor to success. Workers face a benefits cliff when they receive public assistance, earn a raise, and then discover that they make too much money to receive the benefits- but the pay increase is not enough to make up the difference of lost benefits.

Working as part of a coalition, we support the following legislative reforms to public benefits programs that would help businesses retain a talented workforce and support workers’ career development:

- We support **changing MN Family Investment Program (MFIP) income reporting requirements** from monthly reporting to every six months. This would decrease the likelihood of recipients losing eligibility due to a brief increase in income. It would also allow families a pathway to saving and stability.
- We support **continuous Medical Assistance coverage for enrollees under age 21**. Once determined program-eligible, Medicaid enrollees under the age of 21 would maintain coverage for a full twelve months. This would reduce health coverage interruption that often prevents MN children from seeing a doctor when needed.