



**Office of the New York State
Attorney General Letitia James**

Improving Policing and Public Safety:

*Problems Presented by
Police and Vehicle Pursuits*

June 24, 2025

Executive summary



Every day, millions of New Yorkers take to the roads. They deserve traffic safety and policing that is fair and effective. This report describes some of the harms that can arise from police vehicle pursuits and high-speed vehicle chases and proposes reforms to help keep New Yorkers safe.

Police chases have been shown to increase danger and result in injury or fatalities to drivers, passengers, bystanders, and police. We offer the following recommendations:

Pass legislation to increase transparency

New York law enforcement agencies should be required to track and publish a standardized set of data about traffic pursuits and high-speed chases. This should be facilitated by a centralized agency such as the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).

Ban high-speed police pursuits, with very narrow exceptions

High-speed chases can be deadly. Chases may be necessary when a serious or violent felony has been or will be committed, and when the driver's conduct poses an imminent threat of death. But, in large part, ordinary speeding or minor traffic infractions should not lead to a high-speed, dangerous chase.

The authority of the Office of the New York State Attorney General



The Office of the New York State Attorney General (OAG) is charged with protecting the interests of the state and its residents. Three bureaus within OAG work to prevent and address law enforcement misconduct and improve policing practices: the Law Enforcement Misconduct Investigative Office (LEMIO), the Civil Rights Bureau (CRB), and the Office of Special Investigations (OSI).

LEMIO investigates potential wrongdoing, examines departmental policies and procedures, makes recommendations for reform, and publicly reports its findings. Its jurisdiction covers more than 500 local law enforcement agencies. Under Section 75 of New York's Executive Law, the law that created LEMIO, law enforcement agencies must inform the OAG of instances in which their personnel have received five or more complaints within two years. LEMIO also receives intakes from the public about police interactions with civilians.

CRB promotes equal justice under the law and protects the civil rights of New Yorkers by investigating and prosecuting patterns and practices of civil rights violations, including unlawful discrimination by law enforcement agencies based on race, color, national origin, disability, and sex, as well as violations of people's constitutional rights.

OSI investigates deaths caused by the acts or omissions of police officers and peace officers. Prior to its creation on April 1, 2021, with the passage of Section 70-b of New York's Executive Law, the Special Investigation and Prosecutions Unit (SIPU) conducted investigations into the deaths of unarmed civilians, pursuant to a governor's executive order issued in 2015.

How police vehicle pursuits harm New Yorkers

Police pursuits to enforce speeding laws increase danger and lead to fatalities.

Some of the most extreme injury and harm happens when routine traffic stops escalate into pursuits or high-speed police chases. The OAG has reviewed many instances of police vehicular pursuits and chases, often arising out of traffic stops, when the incidents ended in death.

What the data show about pursuits and chases

There is no mandatory centralized database for information about high-speed pursuits by law enforcement agencies in New York or nationwide.¹ However, anecdotal information from existing data sources paints a stark picture. In 2017, the Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Statistics looked at national data pulled from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) maintained by the Department of Transportation and found that from 1996 to 2015, "an average of 355 persons (about one a day) were killed annually in pursuit-related crashes."² Another recent estimate posits that more than 6,200 people have died from these police tactics since 1999.³

1. Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Dept. of Justice (2023). *Vehicular Pursuits: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executives on Managing the Associated Risks* (<https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-r1134-pub.pdf>); Reeves, B., *Police Vehicle Pursuits 2012-2013* (2017). U.S. Dept. of Justice; Dunham, R.G., Alpert, D.P., Kenny, D.J., & Cromwell, P. (March 1998). High Speed Pursuit: The Offenders' Perspective (<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/high-speed-pursuit-offenders-perspective>), *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 25(1).

2. *Police Vehicle Pursuits 2012-2013* (<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/pvp1213.pdf>). This database is limited to crashes on state and federal highways. Dept. of Justice also found that, in jurisdictions where the decision whether to chase was left to officer discretion, rates of vehicle pursuits were the highest, and that police in places with smaller populations used chases more.

3. Bork, H. (2023). No Need for Speed: The Inherent Unreasonableness of High-Speed Police Chases and a New Approach to Excessive Force Litigation (<https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/blr/vol88/iss2/6>) (2023). *Brooklyn L. Rev.* 88(2), 649, 651; Frank, T. (2016, December 1). Black People Are Three Times Likelier to Be Killed in Police Chases (<https://perma.cc/ZF99-XNAN>), *USA Today*.

Earlier data collected by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) found that nationwide nearly a quarter of police chases had a negative outcome, and nine percent resulted in injury (to police, bystanders, or suspects).⁴ And a recent study of FARS data between 2015 and 2020 showed that at least 30 percent of pursuits resulted in crashes, and injuries or fatalities varied from 5 to 17 percent. The data suggests that police pursuits are a very risky practice.

Empirical evidence also suggests that chases make situations more dangerous and aborting a chase is often the most effective way to restore safety. If police stop chasing, the driver will slow down. One source of this empirical evidence comes from a private company which is developing a magnetic GPS unit that can launch from a police car and attach to a speeding car, this creating the opportunity for study. The company tracked 36 case studies and found that “the time to return to within 10 [miles per hour] of a posted speed limit is under two minutes” after a chase is aborted, and 80 percent of the speeders were held accountable when the GPS unit was used.⁵ In addition, another study showed that 75 percent of drivers said they would slow down if they felt safe, i.e., free from the police display of authority.⁶ A study in Virginia concluded there was no evidence that restricting the use of police chases led to more crime; in fact, arrest rates declined, suggesting officers were able to attend to more serious matters than traffic.⁷

4. *Vehicular Pursuits: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executives on Managing the Associated Risks* (<https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-r1134-pub.pdf>), p. 17.

5. Fischbach, T. A., Hadsdy, K., McCall, A. (September 2015). Appendix A, p. 10. In *Pursuit Management: Fleeing Vehicle Tagging and Tracking Technology* (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-J-PURL-gpo84202/pdf/GOVPUB-J-PURL-gpo84202.pdf>), StarChase LLC.

6. *High Speed Pursuit: The Offenders' Perspective* (<https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/high-speed-pursuit-offenders-perspective>).

7. Gillooly, J., et al. (2021). *Measuring the Costs and Benefits Associated with Vehicle Pursuit Policies in Roanoke City and Roanoke County, VA* (<https://www.policingproject.org/vehicle-pursuits>), NYU Policing Project, p. 20.

What New Yorkers experience

Many of the police car pursuits in New York reviewed by OAG have had tragic results for the people involved. The following are examples.⁸

Example 1: 27 rounds of ammunition were fired on a crowded highway after police chased a speeder.

On November 11, 2021, a white male was driving in Brooklyn at around 4 p.m. at a speed of 71 miles per hour, despite a 50 mile-per-hour speed limit. An NYPD Highway Patrol officer used her radar device to measure his speed and decided to pursue him. The officer turned on her car's lights and sirens and directed the driver to pull over, which he did. The officer approached the car. The driver told the officer his license had been suspended, then sped away. The officer ran back to her police car and pursued the driver, repeatedly pulling in front of the vehicle, attempting to slow him down.

A chase then ensued, with the driver repeatedly pulling ahead of the police car, and the police car speeding around and ahead of him, essentially circling each other along the parkway. Another police car joined the chase, and they were able to stop the driver. When he stopped, he reached into the back seat of his car and pulled out a BB gun, which he pointed at the officers, who believed it to be a firearm. The officers both fired at the driver, striking his legs and shoulders, until they were able to disarm him. The driver died. Officers recovered the driver's weapon at the scene, which they later determined to be a BB gun. In total, the officers fired 27 rounds on a busy highway where more than two dozen bystanders were present.

Example 2: Police pursuit of a vehicle making improper lane changes resulted in death of a bystander bicyclist.

On July 8, 2021, a bicyclist was killed as a bystander to a police pursuit in New York City. Officers observed a South Asian man driving a car with a partial South Carolina paper license plate number. Officers followed the vehicle for several blocks at normal speed and observed it making improper lane changes without signaling. The officers activated the police vehicle's lights and sirens to pull over the driver, but the driver fled at a high rate of speed. The driver veered into a bicycle lane on a street corner and then drove through a steady red light, striking a bicyclist, who died from his injuries.

8. These complaints have been verified by relevant documentation provided by the departments, interviews, and body-worn camera or other footage, where available. Where any portion of a complainant's account has not been verified, it is noted as an allegation or statement according to the complainant or driver.

Example 3: Police chase of a speeding motorcyclist resulted in the motorcyclist's death.

On September 5, 2021, a Black man was driving a motorcycle 18 miles above the posted speed limit. An officer made a U-turn, caught up with the motorcycle, and activated his emergency lights to initiate a vehicle and traffic stop. The driver initially decreased his speed, but then fled from the patrol vehicle at a high speed. The officer pursued the fleeing driver but was unable to keep pace with him. The driver crashed into a utility pole, causing him to be thrown and land on a parallel-running roadway. The driver did not survive the impact.

Example 4: Police pursuit of vehicle for low-level equipment violation resulted in death of two uninvolved civilians.

On December 12, 2020, two NYPD officers attempted to stop a driver for window tints and an expired temporary license plate when the driver fled at a high rate of speed. They initiated a vehicle pursuit but shortly thereafter terminated it. The vehicle then collided with an uninvolved vehicle, resulting in the deaths of two civilians in the uninvolved vehicle. The occupants of the vehicle the officers were pursuing fled on foot.

What other jurisdictions are doing to address police pursuits

Because high-speed chases are so dangerous, and deadly, many jurisdictions across the country have begun updating their practices. They have often been moved to do so because of deaths of members of the public and a responsibility to create good public policy, rather than because of legal mandate.⁹ People who are injured and the families of the deceased are often unable to show they were “seized” at the time of the chase. This means that remedying these injuries and deaths is very difficult to achieve in the courts.¹⁰

Jurisdictions that have seen the need for proactive policy change and made policy changes on their own generally fall into two camps: either they have banned chases except for certain offenses (and removed police discretion), or they have defined exactly what sort of balancing test the officer is supposed to use to analyze the decision to engage in a chase.¹¹

In jurisdictions that let officers decide whether to engage in a chase, the officers are generally instructed to balance the seriousness of the underlying crime, the risks of pursuit, and public safety goals.¹² This practice may not have the desired effect of reducing dangerous chases. In its 2017 report, the DOJ concluded that the rate of vehicle pursuits was highest among agencies that left pursuit decisions to the officer.¹³

There is a lack of comprehensive quantitative studies about which type of reform works best. Thus, many departments have little guidance to help them develop policies. The result is a patchwork of attempts at reform. In January 2020, after a number of high-profile civilian deaths, Atlanta police chief Erika Shields decided to suspend police chases altogether while reviewing the department policy.¹⁴ The state of Washington passed a law

9. *Brower v. County of Inyo*, 489 U.S. 593 (1989), 596-97. The current state of the law does not require these reforms, as a person is not considered “seized” under the Fourth Amendment while the police chase is ongoing; *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372 (2007), 386. And, because high-speed chases are objectively dangerous situations, the Supreme Court has held “[a] police officer’s attempt to terminate a dangerous high-speed car chase that threatens the lives of innocent bystanders does not violate the Fourth Amendment, even when it places the fleeing motorist at risk of serious injury or death.” See also: Gilbert, J. (2023). Note: In Pursuit of a Modern Standard: The Constitutional Proportions of Collateral Harm from Pursuits and Police High-Speed Driving (<https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4233&context=clevstlrev>). *Clev. St. L. Rev.* 71(4), 1231, 1233. This article argues that the 14th Amendment’s “shocks the conscience” standard provides an avenue for redress that is too narrow to meet the societal harm here.

10. *No Need for Speed*, pp. 672-674. See Note 3. This argues for a shift in jurisprudence to recognize that the fleeing motorist does not feel “free to leave” as long as the police are engaging in a high-speed chase, and the decision to chase is an attempt to exert control. The article’s author notes that, in *Torres v. Madrid*, 141 S.Ct. 989 (2021), 993-994, the Supreme Court held that a woman was seized during a car chase even though the bullets that hit her body did not actually stop her flight, because the objective intent of firing the gun at her was to restrain her. The author argues that this logic could be extended to situations when a gun is not fired at the driver at all, but the chase itself is **intended** to restrain a person.

11. *No Need for Speed*, p. 660. See Note 3, p. 660.

12. *Restrictive Policies for High-Speed Police Pursuits*, National Institute for Justice & United States Department of Justice (1990).

13. *Police Vehicle Pursuits*, see note 1.

14. Stevens, A. (2020, January 3). Atlanta Police Chief Halts All Vehicle Chases (<https://www.ajc.com/news/crime--law/breaking-atlanta-police-chief-halts-all-vehicle-chases/Oa9Yietold748P8VdQrh7I>). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

in 2021 requiring an officer to have probable cause to believe a violent crime, driving while intoxicated, or a sex offense was committed before engaging in vehicle chases. In addition, the law banned police pursuits for low-level crimes. In 2023, Washington amended the law to require reasonable suspicion that a person in the vehicle had committed or was then committing a crime.¹⁵ In Milwaukee, after a series of deaths in 2010, the city changed its pursuit policy to require that police have probable cause for a violent felony.¹⁶ Initial data collected after the change showed a drop in chases and injuries.¹⁷ California changed its laws to require data transparency. A 2020 report to the California State Senate explained that most chases were initiated for low-level crimes (only about 13.7 percent were suspected of violent crimes) and 23.3 percent of chases resulted in crashes.¹⁸

New York has its own assortment of laws and policies. In New York City, a recent policy change now limits officer discretion to initiate vehicle pursuit to only the most serious and violent crimes, not traffic infractions or low level crimes.¹⁹ This change came after a NYC Department of Investigation (DOI) report found that a 2023 spike in vehicle chases was partly attributable to the new NYPD Community Response Team (CRT) and its focus on street quality-of-life enforcement without “formalized guidelines and standardized protocols”.²⁰ In Buffalo, pursuits are banned where the reason for the attempted stop is a Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL) violation, a misdemeanor, or another non-violent felony.²¹ In Albany, officers are required to consider several factors before starting a chase, such as “[t]he present danger the [fleeing motorist] poses to the public,” “[t]he seriousness of the offense for which the [person] is to be pursued for,” and “[t]he possibility of apprehending the [person] at a later time.”²² The policy bans chases where “[a]n obvious risk of harm to persons or property arising from the pursuit outweighs the potential harm threatened by the escape of the [person]; or [where] a safe and [quick] identification and apprehension of the [person] can be made” another way.²³ Although Albany provides a list of factors for officers

15. Washington Senate OKs Bill to Change Police Pursuit Law (2023, March 9). *Associated Press* (<https://apnews.com/article/police-chase-pursuit-bill-washington-74a66b23c1ee13385e8334a476d76a72>).

16. Garza, J. (2010, March 29). After 4 Deaths, Milwaukee Police Pursuit Policy Changed (<https://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/89484172.html>). *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

17. Haggerty, R. (2010, November 28). Police Pursuit Rules have Cut Chases, Injuries (<https://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/109102454.html>). *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

18. California Highway Patrol (November 2021). Report to the Legislature: Senate Bill 719: 2020 Police Pursuits ([https://www.chp.ca.gov/Documents/2021 SB 719 - Police Pursuits.pdf](https://www.chp.ca.gov/Documents/2021%20SB%20719%20-%20Police%20Pursuits.pdf)).

19. New York City Police Department. (2025, January 15). *Commissioner Tisch announces new NYPD vehicle pursuit policy* [press release]. (<https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr004/commissioner-tisch-new-nypd-vehicle-pursuit-policy>).

20. City of New York. (2024, November 26). *DOI's Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD issues report finding insufficient public information about NYPD's community response team and an absence of written policies and procedures to guide its actions* [press release]. (<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doi/reports/pdf/2024/45CRT.Rpt.Release11.26.2024.pdf>).

21. Rowe, A. (2022, March 31). Did Officers Disobey BPD Rules in City-wide Police Chase? *ABC News 7 Buffalo* (<https://www.wkbw.com/news/local-news/did-officers-disobey-police-department-rules-in-tuesdays-police-chase-across-buffalo>).

22. Albany Police Department (2015). Albany Police Department General Order No. 3.1.15: Pursuit Situations 1-2 (<https://perma.cc/CF3Q-LWCJ>). This memo by Chief Eric Hawkins is one example.

23. Albany Police Department General Order No. 3.1.15: Pursuit Situations. See note 21.

to consider, it does not tell them which factors weigh more heavily than others. So the officer must still make a subjective decision. In Old Westbury, police have decided to purchase new technology — which allows officers to tag a car — to avoid chases.²⁴ In a similar way, the state of Missouri decided to use new technology to help officers catch drivers later, rather than chasing them.²⁵

Recommendations for reform

Across the country, states and localities are making changes to traffic enforcement in an effort to minimize harm and allow police to spend their limited time and resources on activities that improve public safety more effectively. Some jurisdictions have already seen significant successes. New York should join these states and localities by implementing the following reforms.

Pass legislation to increase transparency

There is a growing movement toward transparency and accountability, and nearly half of U.S. states now require data collection when an individual is stopped by law enforcement. Robust statewide data-collection and reporting systems have been implemented in New Jersey,²⁶ California,²⁷ and Connecticut.²⁸ Such systems were recommended for police departments across the country in the 2015 Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.²⁹ California and Connecticut further require robust analysis of the data: California's Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) created a board responsible for reviewing and analyzing traffic-stop data

24. Lehpamer, E. (2023, March 21). NY Police Department Using New Technology to Avoid Police Pursuits (<https://pix11.com/news/local-news/long-island/long-island-police-department-using-new-technology-to-avoid-dangerous-police-pursuits>). *PIX11*.

25. Reid, C. (2018, February 26). The Price of Pursuit: Police Chases Can Lead to Lawsuits, Property Damage (<https://pix11.com/news/local-news/long-island/long-island-police-department-using-new-technology-to-avoid-dangerous-police-pursuits>). *KSHB*.

26. NJ Stat Ann 52:17B-222 et. seq., Law Enforcement Professional Standards Act of 2009; New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (no date). State Police Traffic Stop Dashboard (<https://www.njoag.gov/trafficstops>). Retrieved August 8, 2024. New Jersey law requires that the Office of the Attorney General publish aggregate data regarding New Jersey State Police motor vehicle stops, including the reason for the stop, the actions the trooper took during and after the stop, the driver's race, and whether any evidence was seized. This information is available on a database that is updated every six months and includes a public feedback mechanism. Office of the Attorney General (December 2020), Use of Force Policy (<https://www.nj.gov/oag/force/docs/UOF-2020-1221-Use-of-Force-Policy.pdf>). The New Jersey Attorney General also promulgated a use-of-force policy requiring covered law enforcement agencies to report, within 24 hours of the incident, the following items: the involved officers' names; the age, race, and gender of the victim of each use of force; whether injuries were sustained; the underlying circumstances of the incident; and the kind of force used.

27. California Department of Justice (no date), Open Justice Data Portal (<https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/data>). View and download data on Cal. Gov't Code section 12525, use of force data; Cal. Gov't Code section 12525.2, deaths in custody and arrest-related deaths, and Cal. Gov't Code section 12525.5, stops; Cal. Pen. Code section 13010-13012 and section 13020-13021, arrests; and Cal. Pen. Code section 13012(a)(5), civilian complaints against peace officers; and more, including crimes and clearances and officer staffing.

28. *Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act*, Conn Gen. Stat. sections 54-1l and 54-1m; Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project (no date). Project website (<https://www.ctrp3.org>).

29. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015). *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/final-report-presidents-task-force-21st-century-policing>).

and providing reports of these analyses annually.³⁰ Connecticut's law requires the state's Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to review and analyze stop data and provide annual reports.³¹

Legislation that requires agencies to track and publicize important data and policies would improve public accountability, help agencies manage and evaluate their own performance, and help oversight agencies protect civil liberties and civil rights. Better access to data would also help inform state and local policymakers. These improvements would enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement and ultimately strengthen community trust.

Body-worn cameras and dashcams can also help further transparency, including by aiding oversight agencies in their investigations.³² Where officers engage in a car pursuit or chase, they should be required to state on their body-worn camera any concrete information regarding any reason to believe a serious or violent felony has been or will be committed, or any reason to believe a civilian's conduct immediately threatens severe bodily harm or death to themselves, bystanders, or officers.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and DOJ have conducted pilot programs to collect data on high-speed police pursuits. New York should build on these pilots to collect data on high-speed police pursuits³³ that offer valuable lessons. New York should establish uniform, statewide requirements for reporting on vehicular pursuits and maintain the information in a central database. In addition, the state should require police departments to not only focus on potential police discipline after deaths related to vehicle pursuits. Departments should also analyze the root causes or critical incidents that led to the death. In this way, they can determine what went wrong and how to prevent future harm. Requiring this type of data collection may inform sound policy making around high-speed police chases.

30. Cal. Pen. Code, section 13519.4 (j). View California's RIPA board reports (<https://oag.ca.gov/ab953/board/reports>).

31. *Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act*. See note 71. The Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University works with the Office of Policy and Management and Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project, and has published several annual and supplemental reports (<https://www.ctrp3.org/analysis-reports/reports>).

32. National Conference of State Legislatures (no date). *Body Worn Camera Laws Database* (<https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/body-worn-camera-laws-database>). At least seven states mandate the use of body-worn cameras by law enforcement officers: Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, and South Carolina.

33. International Association for Chiefs of Police (IACP; 2008). *Police Pursuits in an Age of Innovation And Reform* ([https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/p-r/Police Pursuit.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/p-r/Police%20Pursuit.pdf)); National Institute for Justice & United States Department of Justice (1990). *Restrictive Policies for High-Speed Police Pursuits* (<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/122025NCJRS.pdf>). There is no centralized data collection on high-speed police pursuits. Although IACP and DOJ have piloted attempts over the past two decades to gain voluntary data compliance from various police departments, the results have been haphazard. Lack of resources and inconsistent data collection methods seem to hinder departments.

Ban high-speed police pursuits – with narrow exceptions

New York should ban police chases in all but two narrow situations:

- where officers have cause to believe a serious or violent felony has been or will be committed
- where a driver's conduct threatens immediate, severe bodily harm or death to themselves, bystanders, or officers

These protections would eliminate unreasonable police chases that seriously risk harming drivers, passengers, bystanders, and officers.

Until statewide legislation is passed, departments can themselves ban these chases. In either case, strong data collection will help ensure that pursuit policies are based on evidence.

Conclusion

The reforms proposed in this report could save lives and lessen the harmful impacts of police vehicle pursuits. The OAG is committed to protecting New Yorkers' civil rights and health and well-being, both physical and economic. We look forward to working with stakeholders to explore improvements in public safety.