

Ban All Routine Traffic Stops

We must ban all traffic stops that don't involve immediate threats to public safety.

We've all seen the police engage in high-speed car chases in movies and on the news. Such chases are naturally exciting. But so many innocent drivers and pedestrians are killed as a result that some cities have banned car chases entirely.

People do not need to be injured or killed over minor infractions, not the drivers, not the police, and certainly not bystanders.

Likewise, so many routine traffic stops for a broken taillight or driving five miles over the speed limit or having an expired brake tag end up with a police officer shooting an unarmed person, often someone black or brown. And these are drivers who *didn't* flee, who *didn't* pose a threat. But trained police officers are still human beings whose behavior can be influenced by fear and adrenalin. They are people who have grown up in a culture ensuring that even the most open-minded and humane among us have at least some lingering bias. When a life and death decision must be made in a split second, Sunday School lessons on "love thy neighbor" are replaced by the biological imperative to survive.

Are the officers justified in being afraid? Are they overreacting out of bias? We can avoid that emotionally charged debate altogether. More importantly, we can avoid the deadly consequences of both justified and unjustified fear. If police officers are legitimately putting themselves in a life and death situation when stopping a driver for a broken taillight, that traffic

stop simply isn't worth the risk. Let the errant driver go, for God's sake. Revenue from issuing tickets doesn't need to drop. Police can record the license plate (like cameras do at stoplights all the time) and mail a ticket to the offender. There's no need for a physical confrontation of any kind, even a mild, orderly one. Not having to spend millions on investigations and settlements, and not having to suffer constant PR nightmares, must surely be worth something as well.

Unless they're stopping a kidnapper or killer or someone suspected of similarly grave crimes, officers should just snap that photo of the license plate and let the driver move on. If we can't justify endangering lives in a car chase over minor violations, then we shouldn't keep endangering them during traffic stops for non-threatening offenses. Such traffic stops are not worth the death of the police officer, the driver, or any passengers in the car. Drug possession or car theft don't warrant the death penalty, after all, even after an arrest and conviction. They certainly don't warrant execution without a trial. If officers are legitimately in danger when pulling people over for any non-violent transgression, then they are risking their lives unnecessarily.

As a child attending my first big tent circus, I remember hearing the announcer say that the trapeze artists were now going to walk across the tightrope without a net. Even at that young age, I thought, "Do they really need to risk killing themselves for this?"

There are times police officers and other first responders need to put their lives on the line. There are times when everyday civilians need to do it, too.

But there's no need for anyone to risk their life just to reprimand someone over a broken taillight. Some officers have even pulled cars over simply because they were driving three miles

under the speed limit along a corridor frequently used by drug traffickers. If the driver was being so careful not to attract attention, the officers reasoned, he was probably up to no good.

When officers can justify pulling over a car in perfect condition being driven without breaking even the most minor regulation, we have a problem with the status quo.

For the sake of innocent people being killed by the police on a regular basis, we need to stop routine traffic stops that don't involve reckless or intoxicated driving. And even if you're one of those people who don't believe Black Lives Matter, you should *still* want to ban these traffic stops just to protect the people whose lives you *do* think matter.

“We've always done it this way” is no longer a valid rationale for sustaining a policy that inflicts so much unnecessary harm.

Let's ban all routine traffic stops.