

OFFICE OF DAKOTA COUNTY ATTORNEY
JAMES C. BACKSTROM
COUNTY ATTORNEY

2015 Criminal Prosecution Highlights
Adult Felony and Juvenile Crimes

The County Attorney, in addition to being the legal advisor to Dakota County Commissioners and County staff, works closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to keep Dakota County a safe place in which to live and work.

A Message from the Dakota County Attorney...

The **mission** of the Dakota County Attorney's Office is *"to promote justice, public safety, and effective government by prosecuting crime, protecting those in need and representing Dakota County"*. As County Attorney, I believe it is important that people who commit crimes are brought to justice and held accountable for their actions. I also believe that it is important that victims of crime receive necessary assistance to ensure that their rights are protected, their concerns are addressed and defendants make full restitution for their criminal behavior.

I am proud to deliver the highest quality of services and will continue to represent the best interests of the citizens of Dakota County. The information contained in this report is a reflection of the work performed by my Office related to adult and juvenile criminal activity in 2015.

If you would like more information on our work or resources available, please contact me. I look forward to serving you in the future.



James C. Backstrom

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Dakota County Attorney

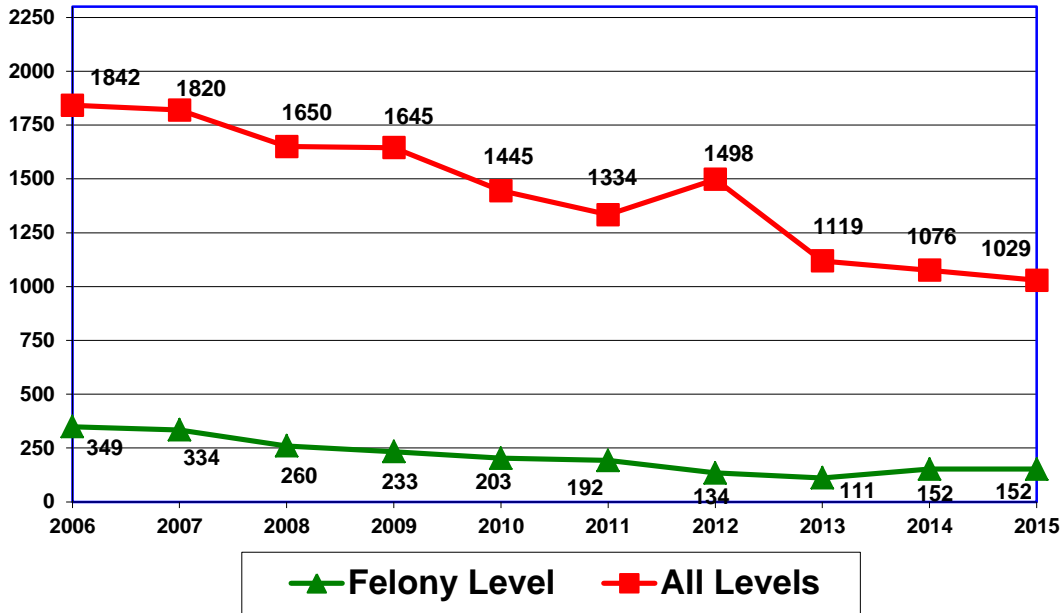
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JUVENILE CRIMES

In Minnesota, it is the responsibility of the County Attorney to prosecute all felony, gross misdemeanor, misdemeanor and some petty misdemeanor crimes that occur within Dakota County which are committed by juveniles (youth 10-17 years old).

- In 2015, a total of **1,029 juvenile criminal cases**¹ were charged.² Of these cases, 837 involved misdemeanor-level offenses. The number of juvenile cases charged involving felony-level crimes was 152 in 2015, the same as 2014.

Below is a 10-year history of juvenile cases charged by the Dakota County Attorney's Office:



JUVENILE CASES BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

A juvenile prosecution begins with the filing of a citation or petition with the court. The number of youth charged with criminal offenses from year to year in Dakota County is remarkably low given our size and growth over the years. The chart below reflects the number of **juvenile cases** charged based on referrals by Dakota County law enforcement agencies for the past five years:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2011</u>
Apple Valley	171	136	173	297	210
Burnsville	145	159	166	182	179
Dakota County Sheriff	83	99	120	139	154
Eagan	125	118	137	184	169
Farmington	34	33	42	61	69
Hastings	49	85	69	97	63
Inver Grove Heights	65	110	98	106	68
Lakeville	120	87	71	141	153
Mendota Heights	14	11	15	13	29
Rosemount	39	52	52	53	62
South St. Paul	102	89	97	121	97
West St. Paul	75	80	72	88	75

YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

The Dakota County Attorney's Office coordinates a number of **youth accountability programs** for first-time offenders involved in the illegal use of alcohol, small amounts of marijuana, lower-level property crimes, disorderly conduct and fire-setting behaviors. Youth are held responsible for their criminal behavior outside of the court process, allowing them to learn from their mistakes while avoiding a criminal record.

Each program where applicable:

- ❖ Requires the involvement of a parent or guardian
- ❖ Focuses on education and prevention
- ❖ Requires payment of restitution to the victim
- ❖ Requires community work service
- ❖ Requires a written letter of apology
- ❖ Requires completion of other sanctions within a timely manner

In 2015, a total of **719 juvenile cases³** were referred to accountability programs as an alternative to juvenile court (compared to 701 in 2014).

PEER COURT

"I am proud of the work being done in our schools, and the many partnerships developed with our law enforcement agencies."

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

The Dakota County Attorney's Office also coordinates and participates in **Peer Court**, a joint project with Dakota County District Court. High school students serve as jurors and identify appropriate sanctions for the juvenile offenders referred to the program. In 2015, seven area high schools hosted peer court: Eastview (Apple Valley), Burnsville, Hastings, Farmington, Lakeville North and South, and South St. Paul. In 2015, **38 juveniles** were referred to Peer Court under the direction of First Judicial District Court Judge Joseph Carter.

CRIME PREVENTION INITIATIVES

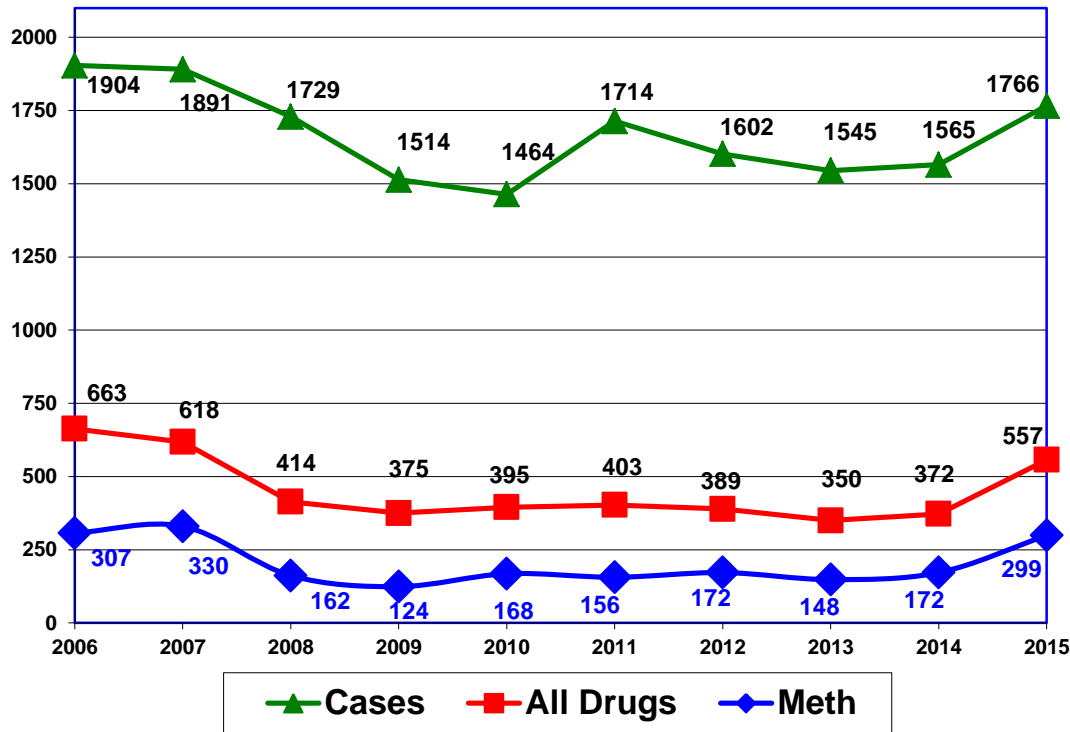
In 2015, the Dakota County Attorney's Office continued to sponsor crime **prevention efforts**, including the 26th annual **Anti-Drug/Violence Poster Contest**. In 2015, over 150 students from school districts within Dakota County submitted posters with anti-drug and anti-violence messages. In addition, over 1,000 students, staff, parents and community members attended prevention programs on such topics as **internet safety, promoting good choices, anti-bullying, safe driving, and mental health**. The Office also worked closely with School Resource Officers and the Safe & Drug Free School Coordinators to increase overall awareness related to youth safety. Dakota County also has a Juvenile Drug Court aimed at treatment and intensive supervision of juveniles who are addicted to illegal drugs.

"One of the most effective things we can do to reduce crime in America is to invest our time, resources and energy in our nation's children. Appropriate early intervention efforts prevent crime before it occurs and help young people make good choices and choose the right path in life."

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

ADULT CRIMES

The Dakota County Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting all felonies and a limited number of gross misdemeanors committed by adults (persons 18 years of age and over), and juveniles certified for prosecution as adults.⁴ The Office also prosecutes misdemeanor offenses that occur in the non-incorporated sections of Dakota County. In 2015, there were **1,766** adult criminal cases filed in Dakota County that involved a felony-level offense. Below is a 10-year history of adult felony cases charged by the Dakota County Attorney's Office:



ADULT CASES CHARGED PER LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

The Dakota County Attorney's Office reviews cases for prosecution that are submitted by local, state and federal law enforcement agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Department of Commerce, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and law enforcement agencies inside and outside of Dakota County. The following chart reflects the number of **adult cases charged** based on referrals from Dakota County law enforcement agencies for the past five years:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2011</u>
Apple Valley	124	123	153	149	144
Burnsville	321	305	298	286	275
Dakota County Sheriff	166	104	99	152	147
Eagan	263	244	251	195	249
Farmington	39	41	33	38	39
Hastings	124	118	87	117	106
Inver Grove Heights	117	113	107	108	142
Lakeville	128	108	140	109	137
Mendota Heights	19	17	19	29	27
Rosemount	38	52	31	52	69
South St. Paul	151	130	132	144	171
West St. Paul	225	150	136	176	158

CRIMES OF VIOLENCE

Sadly, as the chart below indicates, violent crimes are a part of every day in America. Dakota County is not immune from this problem.



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

CASES INVOLVING MURDER

In total, **8 individuals** died in connection with homicide cases charged in 2015 in Dakota County:⁵

9 adults were charged with murder/manslaughter (compared to 5 adults charged with such crimes in 2014)

6 adults were charged with attempted murder in 2015 (compared to 3 adults charged with that crime in 2014)

OTHER CRIMES OF VIOLENCE

In 2015, **431⁶ cases** were charged involving **625 violent crimes** in Dakota County (down from 477 cases charged involving 647 violent crimes in 2014). The following is a breakdown of these felony offenses:

- 8 cases** of criminal vehicular homicide or injury
- 230 cases** of assault (includes domestic-related felonies)⁷
- 83 cases** of threats of violence
- 75 cases** of sex-related offenses
- 34 cases** of robbery
- 32 cases** of dangerous weapon offenses
- 3 cases** of kidnapping

It is important to keep in mind that the number of violent crimes in our community remains relatively low given the population of Dakota County.

ILLEGAL DRUG OFFENSES REMAIN A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM

The increase in the number of felony cases charged in Dakota County in 2015 is primarily attributed to an increase in drug-related cases. A total of **557 cases** involving a felony drug offense were charged in 2015. The total number of cases involving a drug offense in 2015 represents almost 32% of the entire felony caseload of the Dakota County Attorney's Office. The top five drug offenses charged in 2015 are:

Meth-related	299 cases charged	(172 in 2014)
Prescriptions	81 cases charged	(73 in 2014)
Marijuana	69 cases charged	(62 in 2014)
Cocaine	49 cases charged	(36 in 2014)
Heroin	41 cases charged	(27 in 2014)

The Dakota County Attorney's Office works closely with the **Dakota County Drug Task Force**, which consists of officers from the Dakota County Sheriff's Office and police departments in the cities of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Farmington, Hastings, Inver Grove Heights, Lakeville, Mendota Heights, Rosemount, South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Savage. The Dakota County Drug Task Force is vital in combatting illegal drug activity in our community.

"Illegal drug use in Dakota County and across our state and nation is an enormous problem. We work hard with our law enforcement partners to protect our community from drug offenders and to hold them accountable for their crimes."

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

The use, abuse, and possession of illegal drugs continue to be a significant problem in our community. Research has shown that the abuse of prescription medication often leads to the use of illegal street drugs such as heroin. To combat this problem, law enforcement agencies throughout Dakota County have created drop-off boxes to collect unused and expired prescription and over-the-counter medications. Residents of Dakota County are encouraged to contact their local law enforcement agency to find out more about this important service.

ADULT DRUG COURT

Many individuals who commit drug-related crimes are themselves addicted to drugs. To address this problem, the Dakota County Attorney participates in Dakota County's Adult Drug Court. This is a voluntary program that helps non-violent repeat drug offenders get the treatment they need to overcome addiction and live drug and crime free. The intensive program brings together chemical dependency and mental health specialists with professionals from the courts, social services, community corrections, and law enforcement to address addiction and mental health issues and reduce overall recidivism. In 2015, **17 adults** were referred to the Adult Drug Court program. Since the start of the program in 2008, **62 offenders** have successfully graduated.

DEATHS AND INJURIES ON ROADWAYS

Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs remains a serious problem in our state and county. Each year in Minnesota more than 32,000 people are arrested for DWI.⁸ In 2015, 410 persons were killed in motor vehicle crashes on Minnesota roads compared to 370 in 2014. This was the largest annual increase in the number of such deaths in Minnesota since 1944. Additionally, 1,129 individuals were seriously injured in Minnesota traffic crashes last year. Approximately one out of every three traffic fatalities in Minnesota is alcohol-related.⁹

In 2015, 11 deaths occurred and 84 individuals were seriously injured as a result of motor vehicle crashes in Dakota County.

FELONY LEVEL DRIVING WHILE IMPAIRED

A felony-level DWI occurs after an individual has had four DWI's within 10 years. In 2015, there were **39 cases** involving a charge of felony level DWI in Dakota County (compared to 34 in 2014).

"We must remain vigilant in our efforts to prevent impaired driving which kills thousands of people and seriously injures hundreds of thousands more each year in America. Dakota County law enforcement agencies and my Office work hard to prevent these senseless tragedies from happening in our community."

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

DISTRACTED DRIVING

“Distracted driving is a growing problem that we all must take steps to prevent. These crashes are completely preventable.”

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

Distracted driving is also a growing problem. Each year in Minnesota, it is estimated that one in four traffic crashes are caused by “distracted” or inattentive driving (including illegal texting while driving).



FELONY PROPERTY CRIMES

In 2015, **561¹⁰** cases involving 683 felony-level property crimes were charged in Dakota County. The following is a breakdown of the felony-property crimes charged in 2015:

- 235** cases involving theft-related offenses
- 123** cases of forgery or credit card fraud
- 100** cases of burglary
- 85** cases involving stolen property
- 27** cases of public assistance fraud
- 26** cases involving criminal damage to property
- 1** case involving a tax-related offense

“Felony property crimes often involve a serious breach of trust and result in significant financial losses.”

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

There is a growing concern over theft offenses related to cloned credit or gift cards. In 2015, this Office charged five cases involving 14 individuals in which 375 cloned cards were recovered by investigating officers involving hundreds of individual victims with monetary losses exceeding \$66,500. Residents and businesses in Dakota County need to be extremely diligent in protecting personal and credit card data.

SERVING VICTIMS OF CRIME

In most criminal cases there are one or more victims who are emotionally, physically or financially harmed. The Dakota County Attorney’s Victim/Witness Unit serves victims in an effort to minimize the impact of criminal behavior. The advocates assist victims through the criminal justice process. They lend guidance for seeking restitution, preparing victim impact statements, and attend court hearings with victims as needed. In 2015, **2,214 people** received support from the Victim/Witness Unit.

CRIMINAL APPEALS

The responsibilities of the Dakota County Attorney do not necessarily end when a criminal offender is convicted and sentenced. In many cases defendants will appeal their conviction or seek other post-conviction relief from an appellate court. This Office was involved in filing or responding to **56 appeals** in adult criminal cases in 2015, compared to 46 in 2014. Appeals involve significant staff resources and are necessary in efforts to ensure accountability for criminal offenders and the fair administration of justice.

If you have any questions, contact James Backstrom at 651-438-4440.

Detailed charts for both adult and juvenile cases charged by the Dakota County Attorney’s Office in 2015 are available on the website at www.co.dakota.mn.us under Law & Justice. Note that data is shown in a different format from previous years to reflect enhancement to the County Attorney’s Office case management system.

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- ¹ A juvenile may be charged with more than one crime in the same or separate behavioral incident.
 - ² Criminal charges are not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.
 - ³ A juvenile may be referred to one or more Youth Accountability Programs.
 - ⁴ In 2015, no juveniles were prosecuted as adults.
 - ⁵ This includes 1 death that occurred in 2014 and 1 from 2013.
 - ⁶ The total number of violent crime cases differs from the combined totals of the individual listed violent crimes in this section as one defendant may be charged with multiple offenses in the same case.
 - ⁷ Most domestic-related crimes are misdemeanors or gross misdemeanors prosecuted by city attorneys.
 - ⁸ Most driving while impaired offenses are misdemeanors or gross misdemeanors prosecuted by city attorneys.
 - ⁹ This is preliminary data from the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety. The official number will be available mid-year.
 - ¹⁰ The total number of felony property crime cases differs from the combined totals of the individual listed felony property crimes in this section as one defendant may be charged with multiple offenses in the same case.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Dakota County Attorney's Office is:

*To promote justice, public safety, and
effective government by prosecuting crime,
protecting those in need, and
representing Dakota County.*

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