

# NAACP issues call for civility in gang database discourse



FRIDAY, 02 APRIL 2010 15:37 | NAACP – SAINT PAUL CHAPTER #4052



The Saint Paul Branch of the NAACP, the Minneapolis Branch and the Minnesota/Dakota State Conference, conveyed their disappointment at what looks like a breakdown of respectful relations between the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office and guardians for civil rights.

In a letter to the *Pioneer Press* editor, the two organizations shared their dismay in the antagonistic content of the March 1h article, "Ramsey County sheriff fights to save gang-member database that bill would eliminate." In the article, undersheriff Nick O'Hara is quoted as stating that the author of gang database reform legislation, State Sen. Mee Moua -DFL-67, "must have some kind of a perverse support' of gang members".

Sheriff Bob Fletcher is quoted as calling the bill "reckless" and exaggerated that it would "force investigators to revert to an archaic system" of handwritten notes. The NAACP local chapter and state conference said these statements lack the civility, respect, and thoughtfulness they had come to expect from leading law enforcement officials. They also consider the article an attempt to "smokescreen the real issue" of holding Minnesota law enforcement agencies accountable in their collection of secretive and subjective information on individuals as young as 14 years.

Last year a report, "Evaluation of Gang Databases in Minnesota & Recommendations for Change," was published in which the findings reveal that ranking members of some local law enforcement agencies agreed that flaws exist and began making some transformations. In fact, the Ramsey County Sheriff's office announced purging 6,000 people from their database, reducing time on the list to five years, and initiating parental notification. While it was a great start, an institutionalized system of oversight is the only way to guarantee a reasonable balance between public safety and a Minnesota citizen's individual right to privacy, constitutional due process, and equal treatment under the law.

The bill authored by Moua will ensure that the institutions and individuals who already have broad discretionary power over issues of public safety and punishment are accountable for objectivity, impartiality and accuracy at the most basic level of collecting and sharing information about people. Specifically, the bill focuses on two covert databases generated by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) and the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office.

"We are one hundred percent behind Senator Moua on this bill," said NAACP state conference president Duane Reed. So, how do civil rights advocates move forward now that trust has been eroded? Saint Paul chapter president Nathaniel Khaliq is clear about that: "We expect an apology from the sheriff's department so we can get past this irrational fear and continue to work together towards a more objective, reliable, and effective public safety tool that does not infringe on our civil rights."

The Saint Paul Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a membership organization that has worked to eliminate discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, disability or culture since 1913. In doing so, the NAACP improves economic, social and physical well-being for all of Saint Paul's residents.

