

## MPRnews

# The Mpls. cop who writes more tickets than any other

Curtis Gilbert July 31, 2015 9:00 a.m.



Officer Michael Killebrew was behind the wheel of his squad car as he circled a parking lot in north Minneapolis, in a screen shot from a video recorded by Tamarra Robinson, who has been pulled over by Killebrew multiple times for lacking insurance and driving with a suspended license. Courtesy Tamarra Robinson

A recent ACLU analysis of low-level arrest data in Minneapolis showed that African-Americans received a disproportionate share of those misdemeanor citations. But the data also show another kind of disparity:

One police officer handed out about twice as many of those citations as any other.

That officer is Michael Killebrew, a 19-year member of the force. His record exemplifies a controversial approach to police work.

The vast majority of Minneapolis cops issued fewer than 200 misdemeanor citations during the nearly three-year period the ACLU studied. Only 14 officers handed out more than 1,000. Killebrew stood far above even that elite group. He cited or arrested more than 2,000 people.

Killebrew's assignments over the past few years lent themselves to writing lots of tickets. He was freed from dealing with day-to-day 911 calls and tasked with proactively patrolling for crime. But that tells only part of the story. As the numbers show, Killebrew is unique.

Steve Gallagher, who runs the Stevens Square Community Organization, said Killebrew is one of the best and most diligent cops he's ever worked with.

Gallagher used to jokingly warn his neighborhood watch volunteers not to jaywalk on patrol, because Killebrew would write them up for it.

"He was very consistent," Gallagher said. "If you broke the law, then you would get a ticket. He didn't care what race or creed or sex you were. He was very fair to everyone. He would give everyone a ticket or let them know they were doing wrong."

Killebrew rarely gives warnings. That's something Tamarra Robinson learned first-hand. "Never a warning," she said. "A warning would be, 'Next time, have this done and you won't get towed.'"

Police often pulled Robinson over when she lived in north Minneapolis. She was cited repeatedly for not having a valid license or insurance card. Killebrew caught her multiple times and had her car impounded twice.

Now, Robinson says, she's got her license and insurance up to date. And she's moved to St. Paul, in part to get away from Officer Killebrew.



Tamarra Robinson, is a St. Paul resident, who has had problems with Minneapolis police officer Michael Killebrew. Robinson has been stopped while driving by Killebrew several times and cited for not having a valid driver's license. She moved to St. Paul in part to get away from Killebrew. Judy Griesedieck for MPR News

"Being a single parent on disability isn't enough money to afford the tickets that he wants to give and the tows he's doing," she said.

Killebrew's citations run the gamut from littering to loitering, but he has a special talent for traffic stops. Unlicensed and uninsured drivers received more tickets from Killebrew than any other type of violator. He wrote close to 800 citations for lack of auto insurance.

Roberta Englund is glad he did. She runs the Folwell and Webber-Camden neighborhood associations in north Minneapolis, and says uninsured drivers are a huge problem in her part of the city.

"One of the biggest aggravations and fears of residents is when they are in an accident, and it turns out that the automobile is uninsured, and the driver may not be licensed," she said. "Then the burden of the repair falls exclusively to the victim."

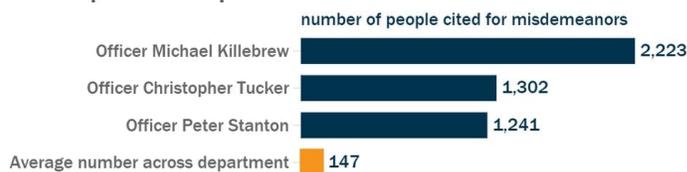
Englund has worked with Killebrew for years. She described him as a quiet cop with a wicked sense of humor. She said he's also incredibly observant and good at spotting crime.

"I believe that he is the kind of cop for a conflicted neighborhood," she said. "I couldn't say that if I thought that he was directing his police tactics towards a particular race of people, and I don't believe Killebrew does that."

About 70 percent of the people Killebrew ticketed were black. The department average was 60 percent. But for about half the time period covered in the report, Killebrew was assigned to the city's north side, which has the highest minority population in Minneapolis.

In addition to leading the city in low-level citations, Killebrew has also advocated publicly for giving police more tools to stop potential criminals. He frequently teaches community volunteers how to make citizens' arrests. And in 2006, he even crafted a proposed ordinance that made it to the Minneapolis City Council.

### Minneapolis' most prolific ticket-writers



Source: Minneapolis Police Department | Jan. 1, 2012 through Sept. 30, 2014

Officer Michael Killebrew cited more people for misdemeanors between Jan. 1, 2012 and Sept. 30, 2014 than any of his Minneapolis Police Department colleagues. He issued 921 more tickets than the department's second most prolific citation-writer – and 2,076 more than the department average over those 21 months. Meg Martin | MPR News graphic

Killebrew's proposal would have made it illegal for pedestrians to walk down city alleys unless they lived on the block or had some official reason for being there. At the time, Killebrew told the Star Tribune he was always chasing criminals down alleys. But some residents, including Susan McCallum, warned the council the proposed ordinance would lead to more racial discrimination.

"In your hearts, you know somebody who looks like me is not going to get stopped in an alley," she said. "But if I weren't so white, and I weren't middle-aged, and I weren't a woman, somebody who saw me would call and say there's some person who's going to do bad in the alley."

The council ultimately agreed with that point of view and voted down Killebrew's proposal. More recently, it repealed ordinances against spitting and lurking with the intent to commit a crime, also over concerns about racial profiling.

A spokesperson for the Minneapolis Police Department said Killebrew didn't want to participate in an interview. But in response to an open records request, the department turned over his personnel file.

Killebrew turned 60 this year, which is five years past the age at which many officers retire. Law enforcement is actually his second career. Before joining the force, he spent 21 years in the Army, retiring as a sergeant. He served in the first Gulf War and is also trained as a licensed practical nurse.

Killebrew's personnel file is full of commendations for his high level of productivity, positive attitude and communication skills. He was named 5th Precinct officer of the year in 2007. Last year, he won the Chief's Award of Merit for the second time.

His former partner and current commander, Inspector Mike Friestleben, said Killebrew's work ethic makes him stand out.

"We're very lucky to have him," he said. "He's just a very hard-working, polite officer, and very seldom do we hear any complaints about him."

There have been 18 complaints against Killebrew — not a huge number, considering his 19 years in the department. Recently, though, he's seen an uptick in complaints; seven were filed in the last year and a half. But all the internal investigations concluded Killebrew did nothing wrong. He's never been disciplined.

In spite of that, Minneapolis NAACP President Nekima Levy-Pounds said Killebrew's record raises red flags.

"I'm not saying that this guy is a bad person," she said. "I don't know him. But I do have concerns about how he is utilizing his authority as an officer."

Levy-Pounds said a zero-tolerance approach to low-level offenses leaves residents feeling persecuted — especially black residents, because there's a heavier police presence in the neighborhoods where they live.

It's an approach to policing sometimes called the "broken windows theory." The idea is that little problems in neighborhoods, like windows that don't get repaired, lead to bigger problems, like violent crime. But Levy-Pounds doesn't buy it. She said broken windows policing does more harm than good.

"When you begin to crack down on low-level offenses, petty offenses, minor offenses, you actually create a whole new set of problems," she said. "Because people wind up in the criminal justice system who otherwise would not have a criminal history."

Lt. Bob Kroll sees it differently. He's president of the Minneapolis Police Federation, and he argues that attacking small crimes can help prevent bigger ones.

"You stop that person for jaywalking," Kroll said. "If he was not jaywalking, and you didn't have cause to stop him, maybe you wouldn't realize that he has a warrant for his arrest for narcotics."

Steve Gallagher, from the Stevens Square Community Organization, said the approach is working for his neighborhood. He's seen the difference it's made at his group's annual meetings.

"About eight years ago, the biggest complaints were prostitution, drug arrests and open drinking, loitering in the streets," he recalled. "This last year, during our annual meeting, our biggest complaints were parking and traffic issues. It's a huge change in our neighborhood. And I put that directly on the Minneapolis Police Department and their broken windows theory."

Gallagher said Killebrew deserves part of the credit. He worked in the area for most of that time period.

Minneapolis Police Chief Janeé Harteau doesn't advocate a "broken windows" approach. She prefers "community policing," where officers are encouraged to have positive interactions with residents, not just enforce the law.

These days, Killebrew isn't making as many arrests as he used to, though. He's no longer tasked with proactively patrolling the streets. The department recently moved him to a unit that focuses on a relatively small number of problem rental properties.

---

## Your support matters.

You make MPR News possible. Individual donations are behind the clarity in coverage from our reporters across the state, stories that connect us, and conversations that provide perspectives. Help ensure MPR remains a resource that brings Minnesotans together.

[Donate today. A gift of \\$17 makes a difference.](#)

Support MPR News

