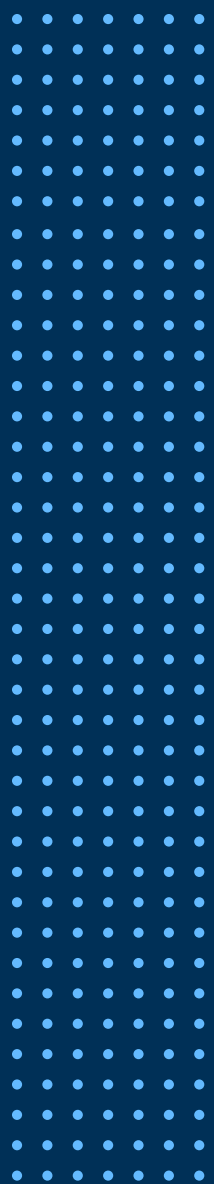
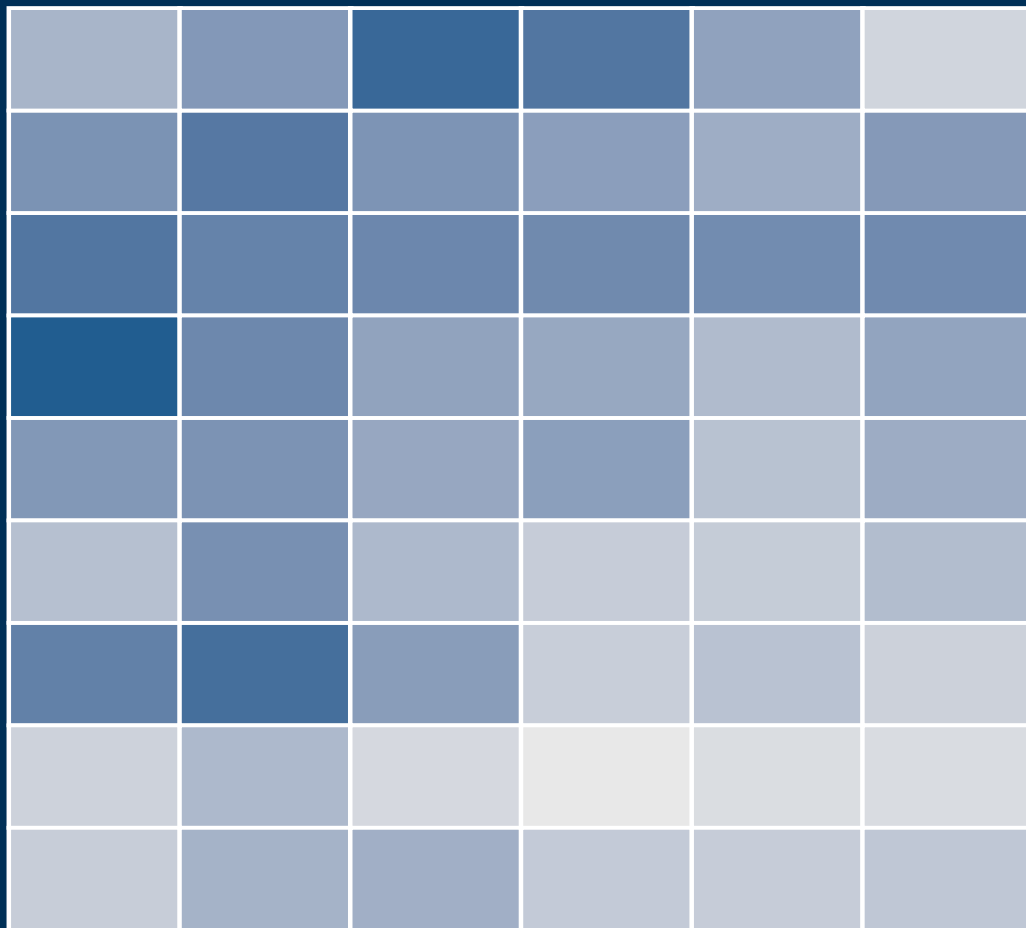


# Analysis of cases declined in Ramsey County, MN

April 2, 2026



Justice  
Innovation  
Lab



## Message from the Ramsey County Attorney

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March 30, 2026



To Whom It May Concern:

As the Ramsey County Attorney, I commissioned this report to support our office's commitment to transparency, continuous improvement, and data-driven decision making. Prosecutorial declination decisions are a critical but often overlooked component of our work, and comprehensive analyses of these decisions remain rare across the nation. In recent years—particularly during the pandemic—questions and occasional rumors circulated about whether prosecutors were declining more cases or taking a different approach to charging decisions. While these narratives often lacked context, they underscored the need for clear, accessible information about how declination decisions are made. This report is one step toward providing that clarity.

Minnesota's criminal prosecution structure is distinct from most jurisdictions in the United States. County Attorneys are responsible for all adult felony-level prosecutions, while City Attorneys handle gross misdemeanors and misdemeanors. Because the County Attorney's Office holds exclusive authority for felony charging decisions, this report focuses solely on felony level matters. Some cases declined at the felony level may later be pursued by City Attorneys as lesser offenses, but those outcomes fall outside the scope of this analysis. County Attorneys review cases presented by investigators to determine whether the evidence establishes probable cause for charging. Appropriate declinations are an essential part of that independent review, particularly when the evidence does not meet statutory elements. While no national benchmarks exist, the declination rates in this report reflect a reasonable balance between investigative work and legal scrutiny, and have remained consistent since 2011, with the exception being the height of the pandemic.

As the report notes, very few federal, state, county, or city prosecuting authorities across the country keep or publish comparable information. By investing in this work, our office is affirming its commitment to a data-driven practice that promotes a thoughtful, evidence-based review of our decision making and enhances our operational practices in partnership with the broader justice community. Humility, openness, and curiosity in pursuit of continuous improvement are important values and strategies for me as I lead our office.

This report was developed by the Justice Innovation Lab, and I extend my sincere thanks for their rigorous analysis and thoughtful approach. Their work has been invaluable in producing a clear, actionable examination of our felony-level declination patterns. I am also grateful to the many justice system and community partners who reviewed and provided feedback on earlier drafts. Their perspectives strengthened both the accuracy and the usefulness of this report.

The findings and insights presented here confirm many good practices and will guide our work going forward. They will also inform the development of a new second-look declination policy and a new drug-addiction intervention strategy, improve communication and coordination with our law enforcement and city prosecution partners, and strengthen our engagement with victims. This report represents an important step in our ongoing efforts to serve the community with fairness, accountability, and integrity.

As we move ahead, we will use this data and thoughtful feedback from our partners to sharpen our practices, deepen collaboration across the justice system, and improve our service to the people of Ramsey County. This work is not simply about measuring outcomes and evaluating patterns, it is about building a system that is transparent, equitable, and responsive to the community we serve. I remain committed to ensuring that these insights lead to meaningful action and continued progress toward a vision of safety and justice for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John J. Choi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a trailing flourish.

**John J. Choi**  
Ramsey County Attorney

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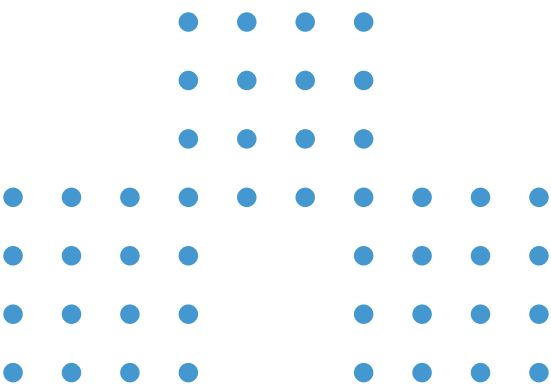


# Introduction

The goal of this report is to analyze cases declined by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office (RCAO) in order to gain a better understanding of patterns that could be utilized to improve efficiency or fairness.

Minnesota County Attorney Offices operate under a structure that is distinct from County and District Attorney Offices in other states. Under Minnesota law, County Attorneys have jurisdiction over all adult felony-level prosecutions, while City Attorneys are responsible for prosecuting gross misdemeanor and misdemeanor offenses. This report tracks outcomes only for felony-level prosecutions. It is important to note that many cases declined at the felony level are subsequently charged as gross misdemeanors or misdemeanors by City Attorney Offices. However, those outcomes fall outside the scope of this report and are not captured here.

The analyses performed by Justice Innovation Lab (JIL) include the number and rate of declined cases over time, the most common declined charges and reasons for declination, rates of declination by charge type and race/ethnicity, and the time to resolve declined cases.



# Definitions

Below are select definitions used throughout this report. You can also learn more about the prosecutorial process and use of data in prosecution through [JIL's criminal justice explainer](#).

**Case:** A single charge, or multiple charges, covering all crimes of which a person is accused, stemming from a single incident.

**Charge:** The crime, defined by law, of which a person is accused. An arrest charge is determined by the arresting agency, such as a police department. A charge may change during the criminal legal process; therefore, the arrest charge may differ from the filed charge (determined by the prosecuting authority) or the disposition charge (final charge of record when the case is resolved).

**Charged:** To be formally accused of committing a crime by RCAO, through the act of filing a complaint.

**Declination:** A declination occurs when RCAO decides not to file a charge that law enforcement has referred for prosecution. There are several potential reasons for declination decisions. See [Table A1 of the Appendix](#) for a list of declination reasons used by RCAO.

**Dismissal:** A dismissal occurs when RCAO decides to drop a charge after a complaint has been filed. Dismissals are not evaluated in this report, but this definition is useful in distinguishing referred charges that are dropped without a complaint being filed (declination) and those that are dropped after a complaint has been filed (dismissal).

**Disposition:** The final outcome of a case. When RCAO declines to prosecute a case, the disposition of that case is a declination.

**Disproportionality:** In the context of this report, disproportionality refers to the over- or under-representation of one group relative to the general population. For example, Black individuals are over-represented in charge referrals since the percentage of Black individuals referred for prosecution is greater than the percentage of Black people in the general population.

**Lead charge:** The most severe crime a person has been accused of in a given case. In the RCAO data, this charge is indicated by a "lead charge" flag. "Lead charge" may be used interchangeably with the term "top charge."

**Referral:** A case that has been sent ("referred") to RCAO by law enforcement for prosecution. Not all arrests result in a referral.

**Statistically significant:** The probability that the event happened purely by chance is sufficiently small (i.e., less than 5%) that it can be concluded that there is likely an external explanation for the outcome.

# Background



Not all criminal cases that are referred to a prosecutor's office are ultimately charged. Prosecutors may decline to file charges for various reasons, including not enough evidence being available, an uncooperative victim or witness, or the case being more appropriate for a lower court or an alternative to prosecution, such as diversion.

Understanding the prevalence of case declinations and the reasons behind them can provide valuable insight on ways to improve the criminal justice system. High declination rates for a particular crime, or frequent declinations for a particular reason, may indicate the need to change police or prosecutor policy or practice. Declination rates can also be used to identify potential bias. The Ramsey County Attorney's Office requested this report to identify trends and facilitate conversations with County police departments to improve public safety and understand the impact of current practices and policies.

Justice Counts, a collaborative initiative created to improve the accessibility and availability of criminal justice data, identifies case declinations as an [essential metric](#). Unfortunately, case declination statistics are not widely available, so it is difficult to develop a comprehensive picture of declination practices. Felony case declinations can also vary significantly among jurisdictions due to a variety of local factors, including legal rules, diversion practices, political environment, availability of court and prosecutor resources, the maximum time allowed to file charges, categorical declination policies,<sup>1</sup> and the extent of prosecutorial discretion permitted.<sup>2</sup>

Reporting by the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that U.S. attorneys declined 26% of federal cases completed in fiscal year 2023, with property fraud and regulatory public order charges being the most likely to be declined.<sup>3</sup> However, state prosecutors typically handle different types of cases than federal prosecutors, and there is limited published research on local declination rates.

Research by Southern Methodist University's Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center involving three, anonymous, mid-size jurisdictions found felony declination rates ranging from 17.4% to 28.7%, although this study also noted that the administrative data on declination rates "were too different to permit direct comparisons across offices."<sup>4</sup> A 2022 Prosecutorial Performance Indicators (PPI) report on declination rates in 15 jurisdictions cites an average declination rate of 28%, but this differed significantly among the jurisdictions studied and the analysis did not differentiate felony and misdemeanor declinations.<sup>5</sup> At least one study has identified that misdemeanor declination rates tend to be lower than felony declination rates.<sup>6</sup> In jurisdictions where PPI was able to determine charge types, person offenses (violence, domestic violence) were more likely to be declined than other charges.

This report provides an important contribution to declination research. While it only focuses on a single jurisdiction, it assesses several aspects of declinations, including declination reasons, declined charge types, and declination times.

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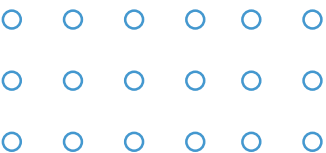
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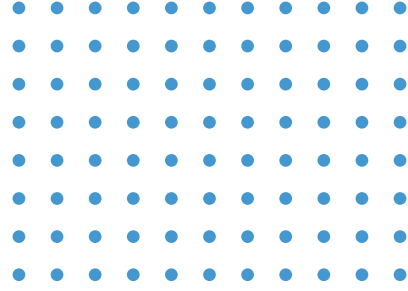
4 Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center. "Screening and Charging Practices in Three Mid-Sized Jurisdictions." SMU Dedman School of Law, Feb. 2021, [scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=deasoncenter](https://scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=deasoncenter)

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6 Natapoff, Alexandra. "Misdemeanor Declination: A Theory of Internal Separation of Powers." *Texas Law Review*, vol. 102, <https://texaslawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Natapoff.printer.pdf>



# Data



The data used in this report include adult felony cases referred to RCAO between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2024. Disposed case counts only include cases closed by September 9, 2025, when JIL received the data from RCAO. In the analyses, each case is associated with a single defendant; there was not a way to identify co-defendants in the data.

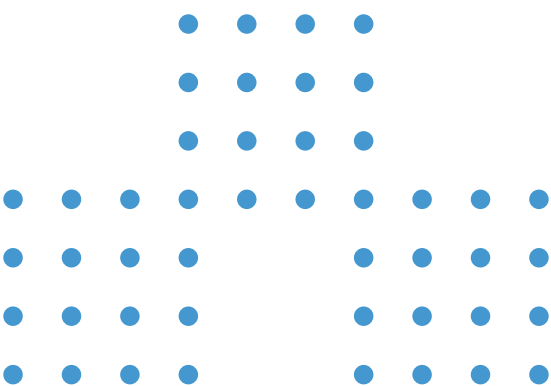
Felony cases are referred to RCAO by law enforcement, after which an RCAO attorney reviews the case to decide whether to file charges in court. The definition of a declined charge, for the purposes of this report, is a charge that RCAO decides not to file following this review. Declined charges differ from dismissed charges, which are dropped after a charge has been filed.

The reasons for which RCAO may decline to file a charge are identified in [Table A1 of the Appendix](#). It is important to note that updates were made to the declination reasons used by RCAO in mid-2022. At that time, RCAO discontinued use of a generic “Refusal” declination reason and implemented a set of more detailed descriptions to identify the specific rationale for declining a charge. From that point forward, reviewing attorneys selected the description that most accurately reflected the basis for their decision. For cases declined prior to this change, RCAO interns reviewed attorneys’ contemporaneous notes and assigned the declination reason that most appropriately aligned with the information recorded. The fact that declination reasons for cases declined prior to mid-2022 were later selected by a legal intern based on case notes and not by the original reviewing attorney should be taken into account when considering any differences in the use of declination reasons over time.

In this report, analysis of declinations is limited to only situations where all charges in a case are declined. This constitutes the majority of cases with declined charges; 97.8% of cases with any declined charge had all charges declined.

Throughout the analyses, a case is characterized by the lead charge, as indicated by the lead charge flag in the data. Only the lead charge is included in the analyses. Therefore, if a case is referred to as a “domestic assault case,” this means that the most severe charge in the case was a domestic assault charge; there may or not be additional charges in the case. Discussions with RCAO have identified that the lead charge flag is likely more accurate for filed charges than referred charges, but declined charges are never filed. Therefore, the lead charge flag may not always correctly identify the most severe referred charge in every multi-charge case. However, 98.2% of declined cases in the data have only a single charge (compared to 71.1% of all referred cases), so any potentially mischaracterized lead charges in the 1.8% of declined cases with multiple referred charges should have minimal impact on results.

It should also be noted that when analyzing time trends throughout the report, disposition dates are used instead of referral dates. Disposition dates are used because this limits analysis to cases with a known outcome as of a given date. If referral dates were used, comparisons could be less accurate since cases that were referred may not yet be closed. [Figure A1 of the Appendix](#) provides a comparison of declinations by referral date and disposition date for additional context.



# Analysis

## Declinations over time

Overall, 13,749 cases that were referred from 2018 through 2024 were declined as of September 9, 2025. These declinations account for 38.4% of disposed cases, compared to 61.6% that were charged.

Figure 1 shows the total number of declined cases by disposition year (top), and the percentage of disposed cases that were declined and charged (bottom). Declinations from 2018 are excluded throughout the report when looking at annual data, since some cases declined in 2018 will be missing if they were referred prior to 2018. Likewise, 2025 data are also excluded from annual analyses since there would only be a partial year of data.

- Both the total number of declined cases (2,556) and case declination rate (53.9%) peaked in 2020 and remained relatively high in 2021, likely due to COVID-19 disruptions that shut down courts.

- The fewest declinations occurred in 2023, in terms of both total declined cases (1,657) and percentage of disposed cases (30.7%). It is possible that declinations made up a smaller percentage of cases disposed in 2023 due to a plan by the State court to resolve COVID-induced case backlogs by the end of that year.
- Following three years of decreases, the declination rate increased in 2024, to 34.3%, and the number of declinations increased slightly. While there is not a clear reason for this change, there are additional factors that could contribute to variations in declination rate over time, such as turnover of personnel involved in the charging process (e.g., law enforcement, investigators, prosecutors).

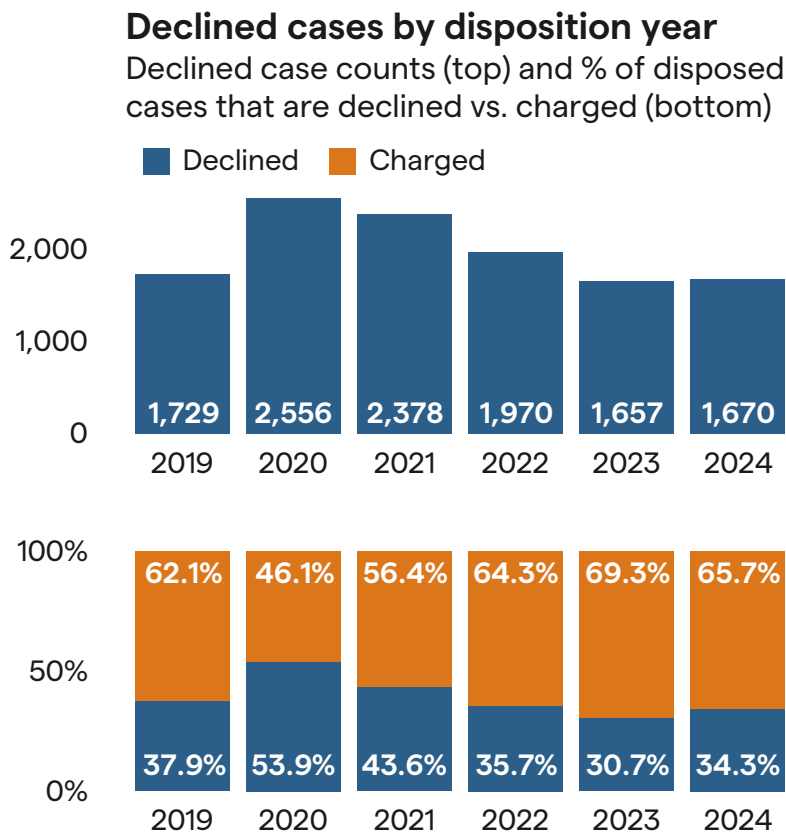
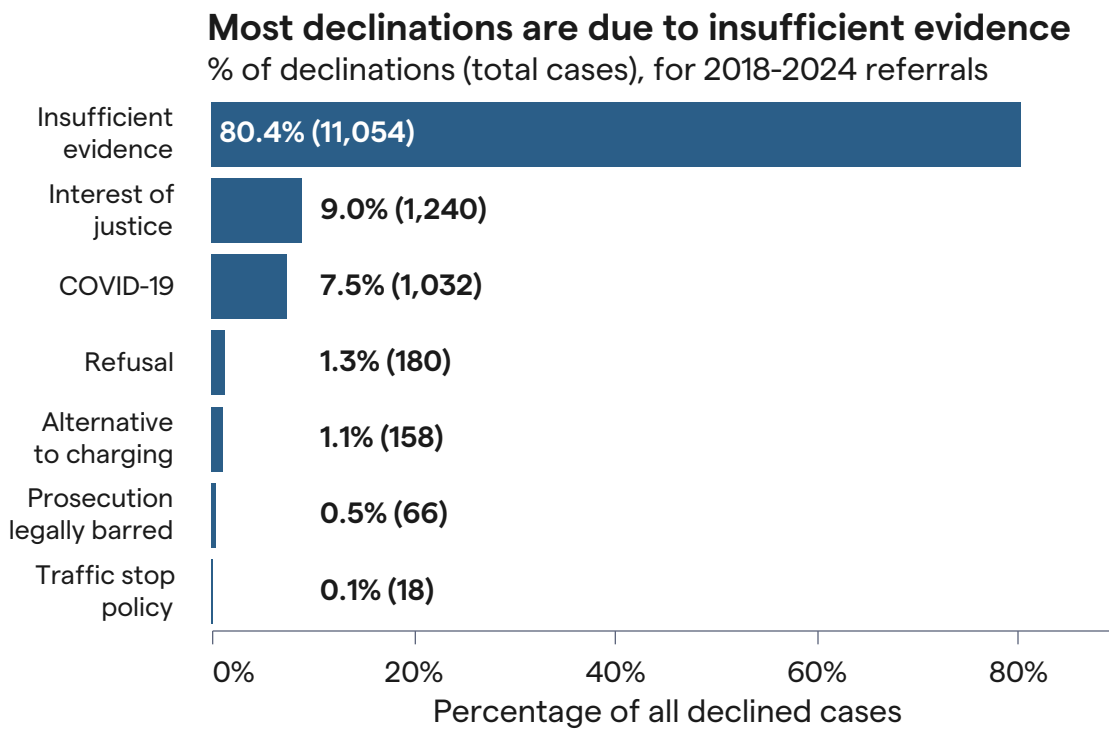


Figure 1. Annual declined case totals (top) and declined and charged cases as a percentage of all dispositions (bottom).

# Declination reasons

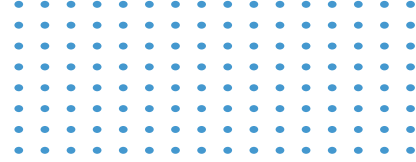
## General declination categories

JIL grouped the declination reasons into several categories, as identified in [Table A1 of the Appendix](#), to determine the most common general reasons for a case to be declined. As shown in Figure 2 “Insufficient evidence” is overwhelmingly the most common reason for a case to be declined. For cases referred between 2018 and 2024, 11,054 cases were declined as a result of insufficient evidence, accounting for 80.4% of all declinations from that time period. The next most common declination reasons comprised a much smaller percentage of declinations—“Interest of justice” (9.0%) and “COVID-19” (7.5%).



**Figure 2.** General declination reasons as a percentage of all declined cases, along with total declined case counts.

When looking at trends over time, Figure 3 shows the percentage of all declined cases in a given year for each general declination reason (the column of percentages for each year adds up to ~100%). In 2024, the “COVID-19” declination category still accounted for 6.5% of all declinations, though this is considerably lower than its peak use in 2021 (12.3% of declinations). The “Interest of justice” category accounted for its lowest percentage of declinations in 2024 (5.3%), following a steady decline from its peak of 12.6% of declinations in 2021, to 8.2% in 2022 and 7.4% in 2023.



The number of declined cases has decreased in recent years for some of the declination reasons, including “Alternative to charging,” “Interest of justice,” and “COVID-19.” While it makes sense for declinations related to COVID-19 to decrease over time, it is not clear why declinations related to alternatives to charging or the interest of justice would decline. “Alternative to charging” declinations are exclusively for cases where a defendant enrolled in, and successfully completed, a pre-charge diversion program. Further analysis would be needed to evaluate the cause of changes in the number of successful diversion declinations over time, such as assessing any changes in diversion referrals or program completion rates.

Declinations for insufficient evidence—by far the most common declination category—also decreased year-to-year from 2020 to 2023, but saw a slight increase in 2024. The “Refusal” declination category is no longer used, which is why there are no declinations for this reason in 2023 and 2024.

### Percentage of all annual declinations, by general reason, with (declined case count)

Each column sums to approximately 100%

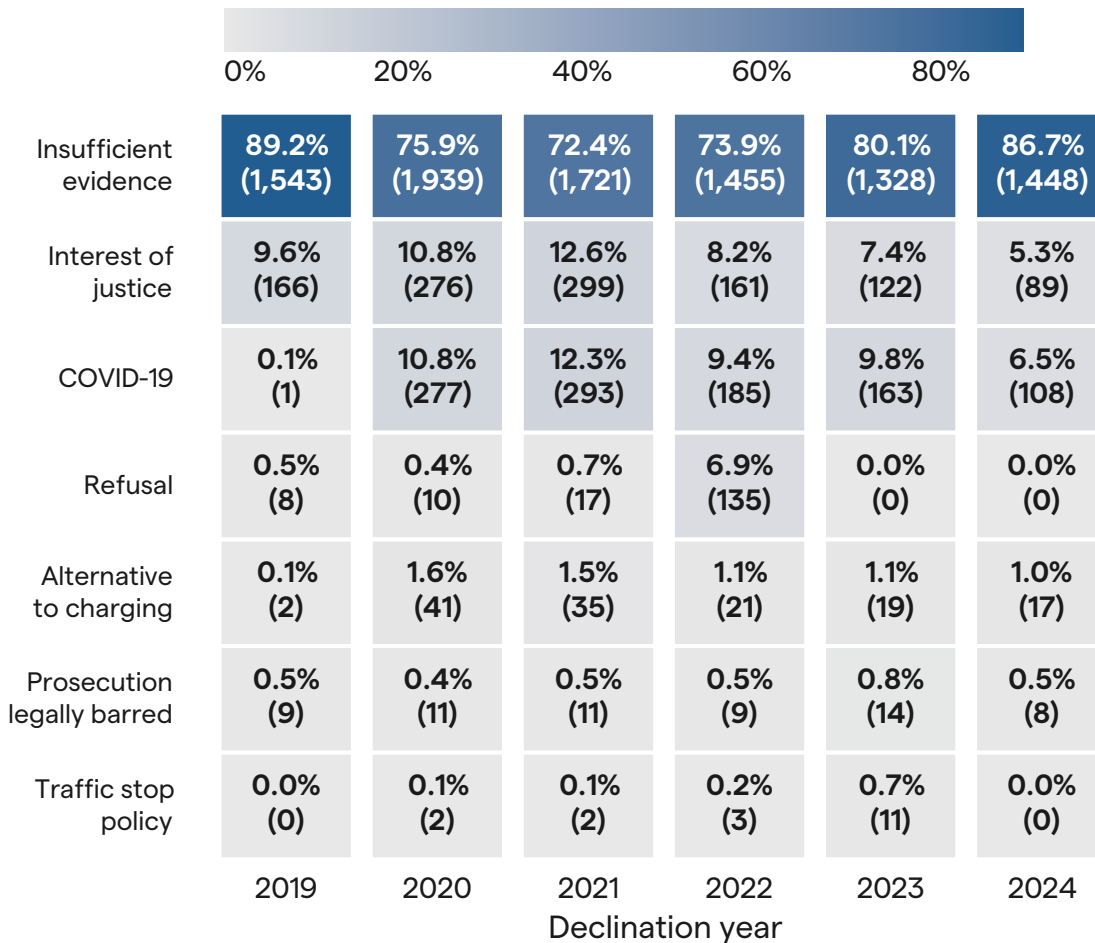
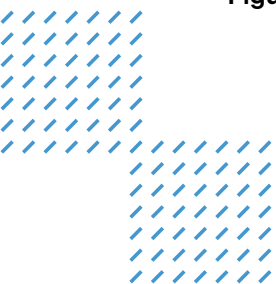


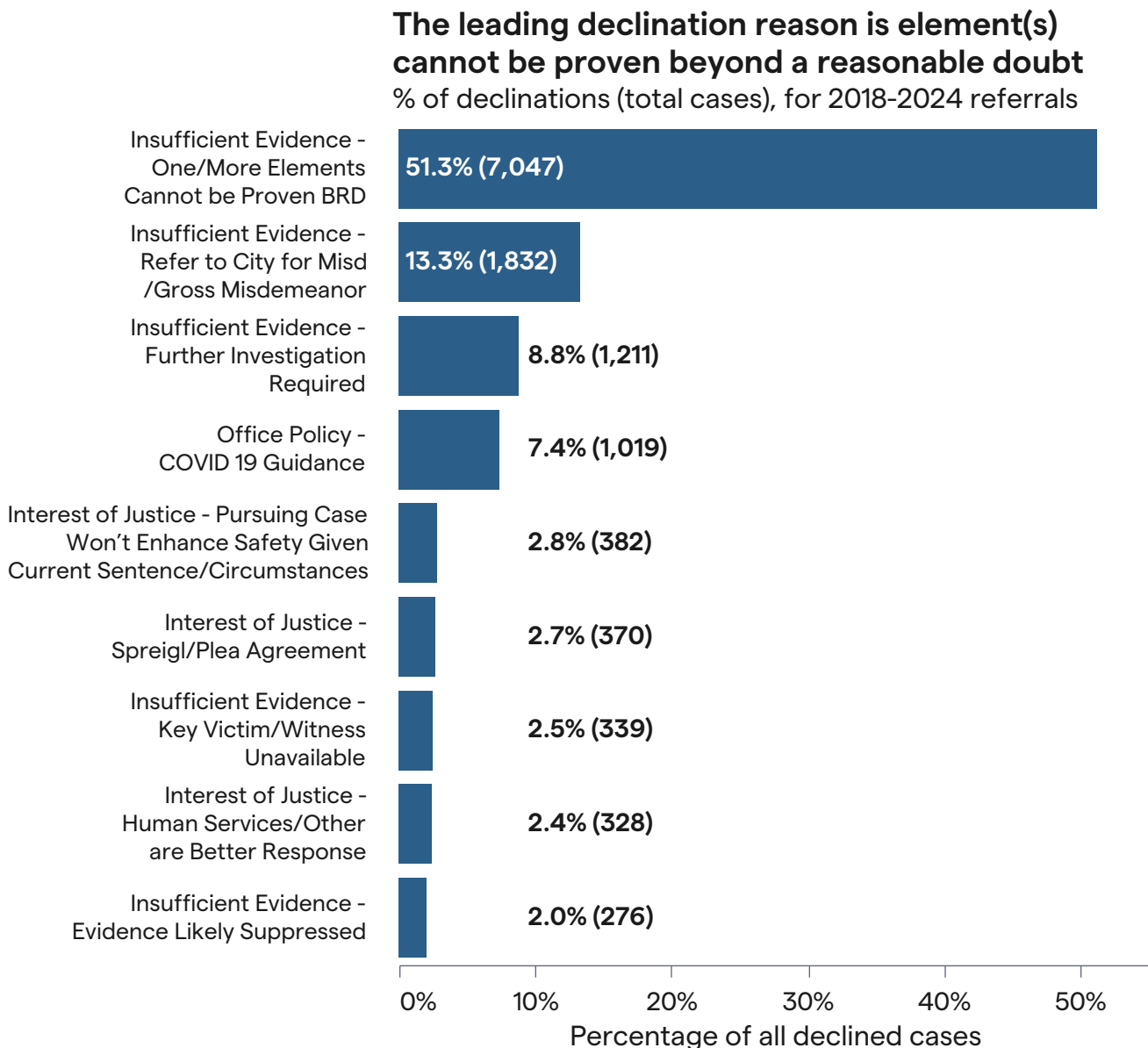
Figure 3. Percentage of annual declined cases, per general declination reason, with (case counts).



## Specific declination reasons

Figure 4 shows the most prevalent specific declination reasons in the data. All reasons that account for at least 2% of declinations overall are shown. The most commonly used declination reason is that one or more elements cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt (BRD), which accounts for 51.3% of all declined cases. This is followed by cases declined as felonies but referred to the City Attorney’s Office as misdemeanors (13.3%), and cases where further investigation is required (8.8%). The ultimate case outcome is unknown for declined cases that were referred to the City Attorney’s Office for misdemeanor charges, since the disposition of these cases is outside of RCAO’s purview.

For cases that were declined because further investigation was required, there is an opportunity for RCAO and law enforcement to develop a communication loop to ensure that further investigation efforts are made and completed investigations are resubmitted. Additionally, while only 2.5% of declinations were related to a key victim or witness being unavailable, this may be an area to review to ensure that prosecutors and investigators are well-trained on identifying evidence that allows them to proceed with the case regardless of availability.



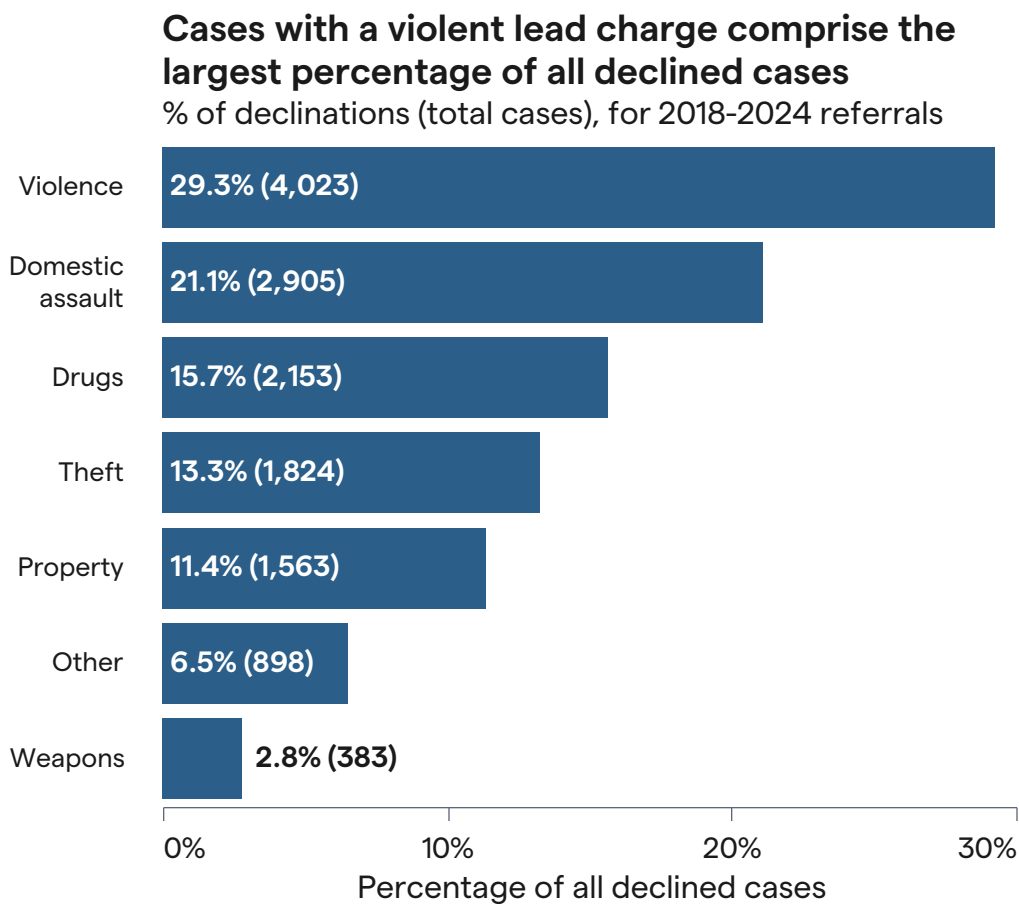
**Figure 4.** Specific declination reasons as a percentage of all declined cases, along with total declined case counts.

# Declined charges

## General charge groups

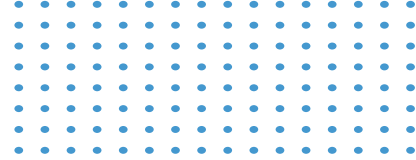
To analyze general trends in declined charges, JIL grouped all referred charges into seven charge groups: domestic assault, drugs, property, theft, violence, weapons, and other. The most common declined charges in each of these categories are provided in [Table A2 of the Appendix](#).

As shown in Figure 5, violence (non-domestic) is the most common declined charge category, accounting for 29.3% of all lead charges in declined cases, followed by domestic assault at 21.1%. Cases with a weapons lead charge account for the fewest declinations, 2.8%.



**Figure 5.** Percentage of all declined cases attributed to each charge group, along with total declined case counts.

While Figure 5 showed the percentage of all declined cases attributed to each general charge group, Figure 6 shows the declination rate for each general charge group (the percentage of disposed cases for each charge group that are declined). The declination rate is highest for domestic assault, with 50.2% of all disposed domestic assault cases being declined. This is followed closely by violence and drugs, each with a 47.6% declination rate. These results are consistent with PPI's declination research showing that violence and domestic violence are the most likely charge types to be declined.



## Cases with a domestic assault lead charge have the highest declination rate

2018-2024 referrals

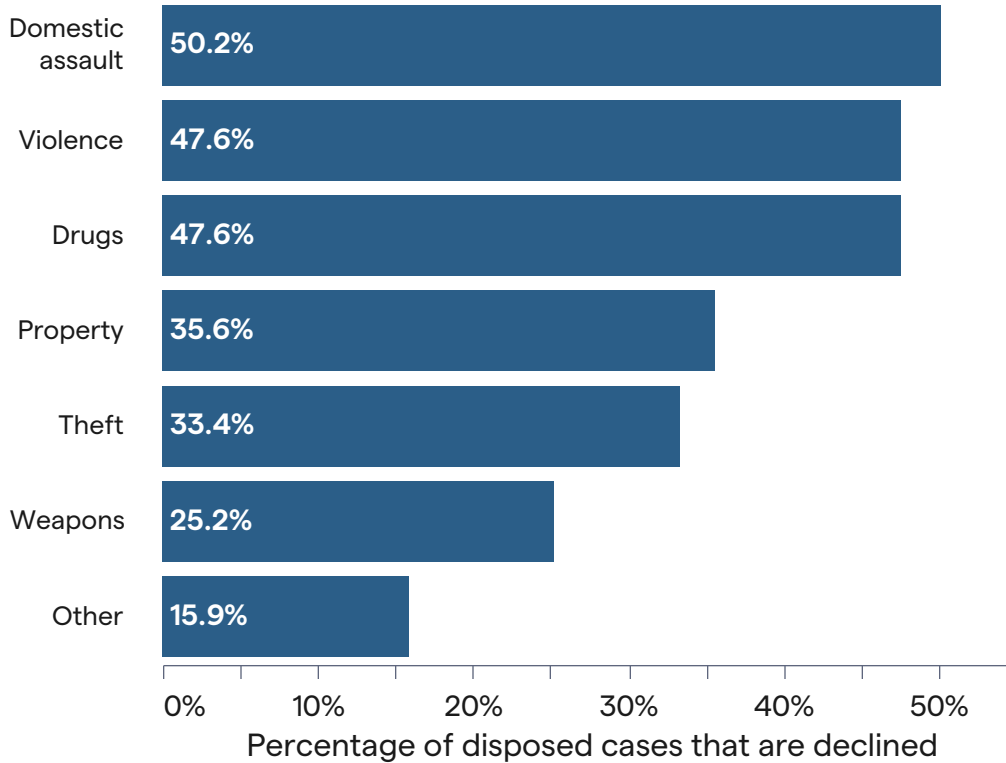


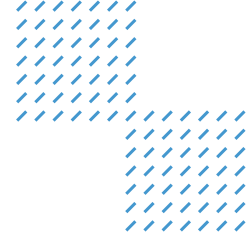
Figure 6. Percentage of all disposed cases that are declined, for each charge group.

## Specific charges

The analysis above showed that violence and domestic assault account for over half of all declined cases (50.4% combined, per Figure 5), with the domestic assault charge category having the highest declination rate, at 50.2% (Figure 6). Next, JIL analyzed which specific charges are most likely to be declined.

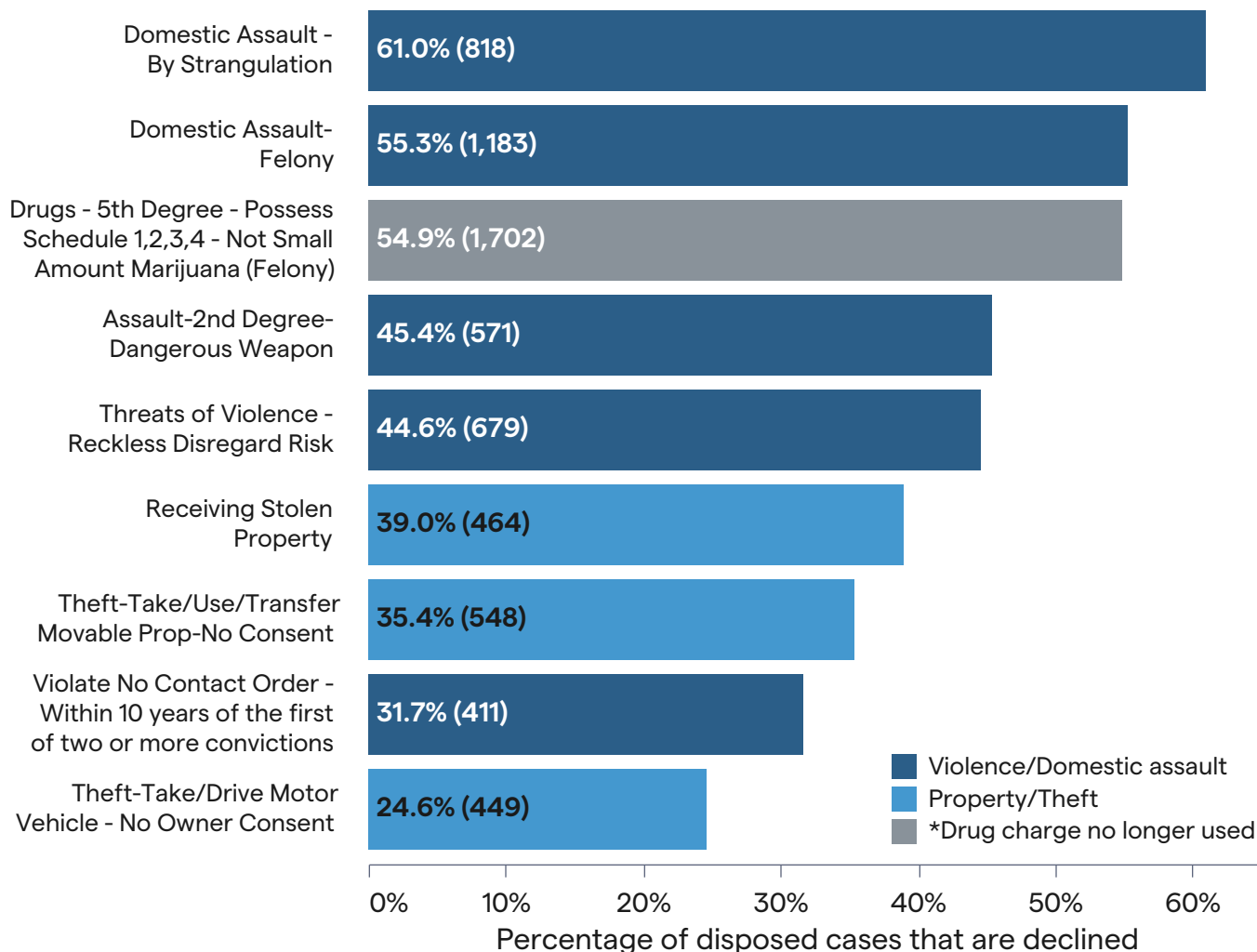
Figure 7 shows the declination rates for each specific charge that accounts for at least 2% of all declined cases. Two domestic assault charges have declinations in over half of all disposed cases where they are the lead charge, “Domestic Assault - By Strangulation” (61.0% declination rate) and “Domestic Assault - Felony” (55.3% declination rate). Domestic assault and other violent charges have four of the top five declination rates. Per RCAO, strangulation in particular is a charge that may lack sufficient evidence to prove the specific definition of the crime, but may still be provable as a non-felony domestic assault. This is supported by the fact that 37.8% of domestic assault by strangulation declinations are referred to the City Prosecutor for non-felony prosecution.

The felony marijuana possession charge accounts for the highest number of declinations in the data (1,702). However, due to the mid-2023 legalization of cannabis use in Minnesota, declinations for this specific drug charge are expected to decline as arrests for this charge decrease in response to the law. Most of the marijuana possession declinations represented in Figure 7 occurred before the change in legalization. This impact can be seen in Figure 8, which shows lower numbers of declinations for this charge in 2023 and 2024. Other drug charges that were not impacted by the legal change account for far fewer declinations and are therefore not included in the charts.



## Two domestic assault charges have declinations in over half of all disposed cases where they are the lead charge

% declined (declined cases), for 2018-2024 referrals



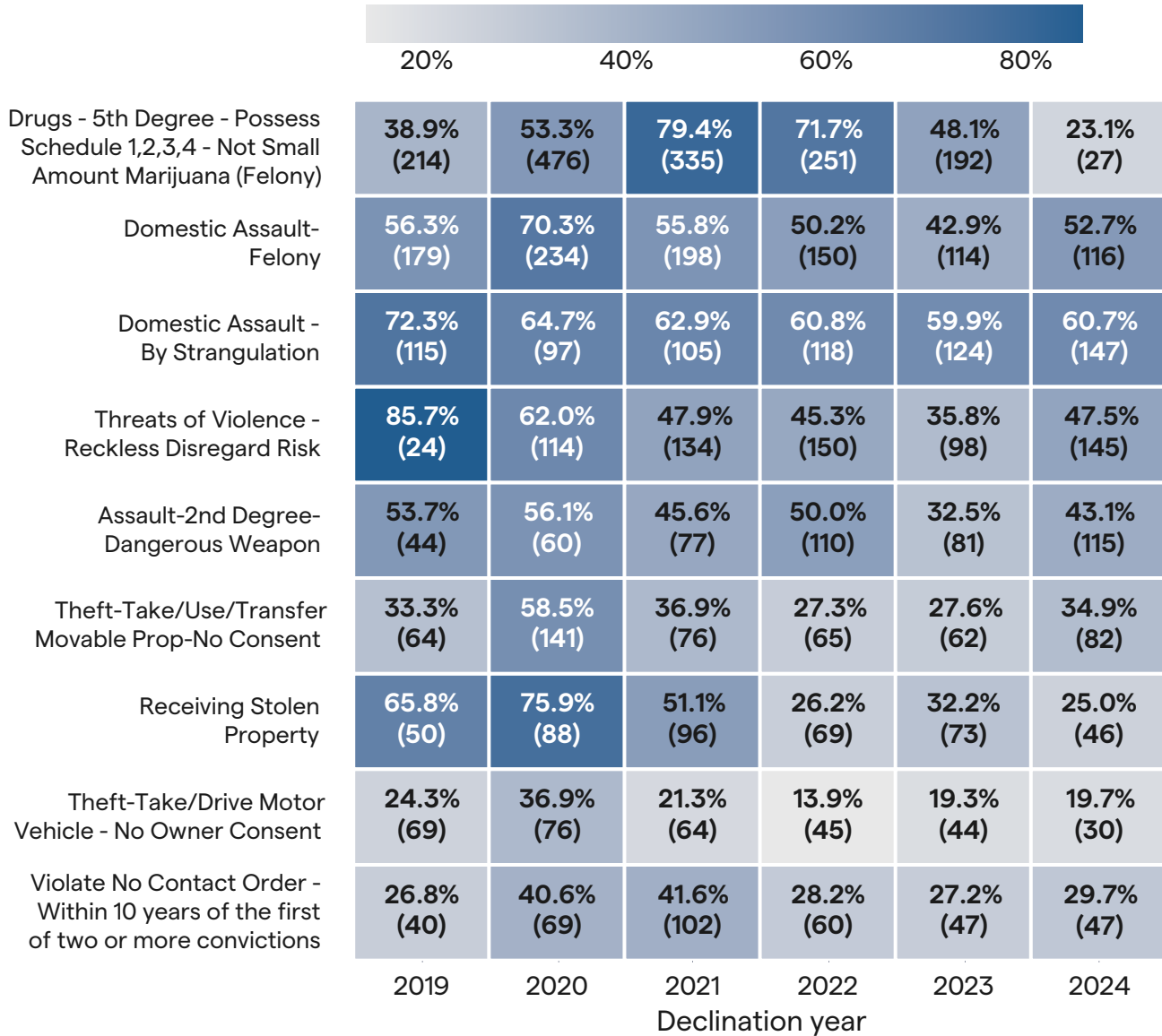
**Figure 7.** Case declination rates for all lead charges accounting for at least 2% of declinations overall.

Figure 8 focuses on declinations for specific charges over time, with the annual declination rate and declined case count shown for each charge. Declination rates peaked for several charges in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (felony domestic assault, 2nd degree assault with a dangerous weapon, theft of movable property, receiving stolen property, and theft of a motor vehicle). Declination rates were lowest in 2023 for multiple violent/domestic assault charges, including felony domestic assault, domestic assault by strangulation, threats of violence, and 2nd degree assault with a dangerous weapon. As discussed earlier, it is possible that declination rates decreased in 2023 due to a plan by the State court to resolve COVID-induced court backlogs by the end of that year.



## Annual declination rates for specific charges, with (declined case count)

2018-2024 referrals



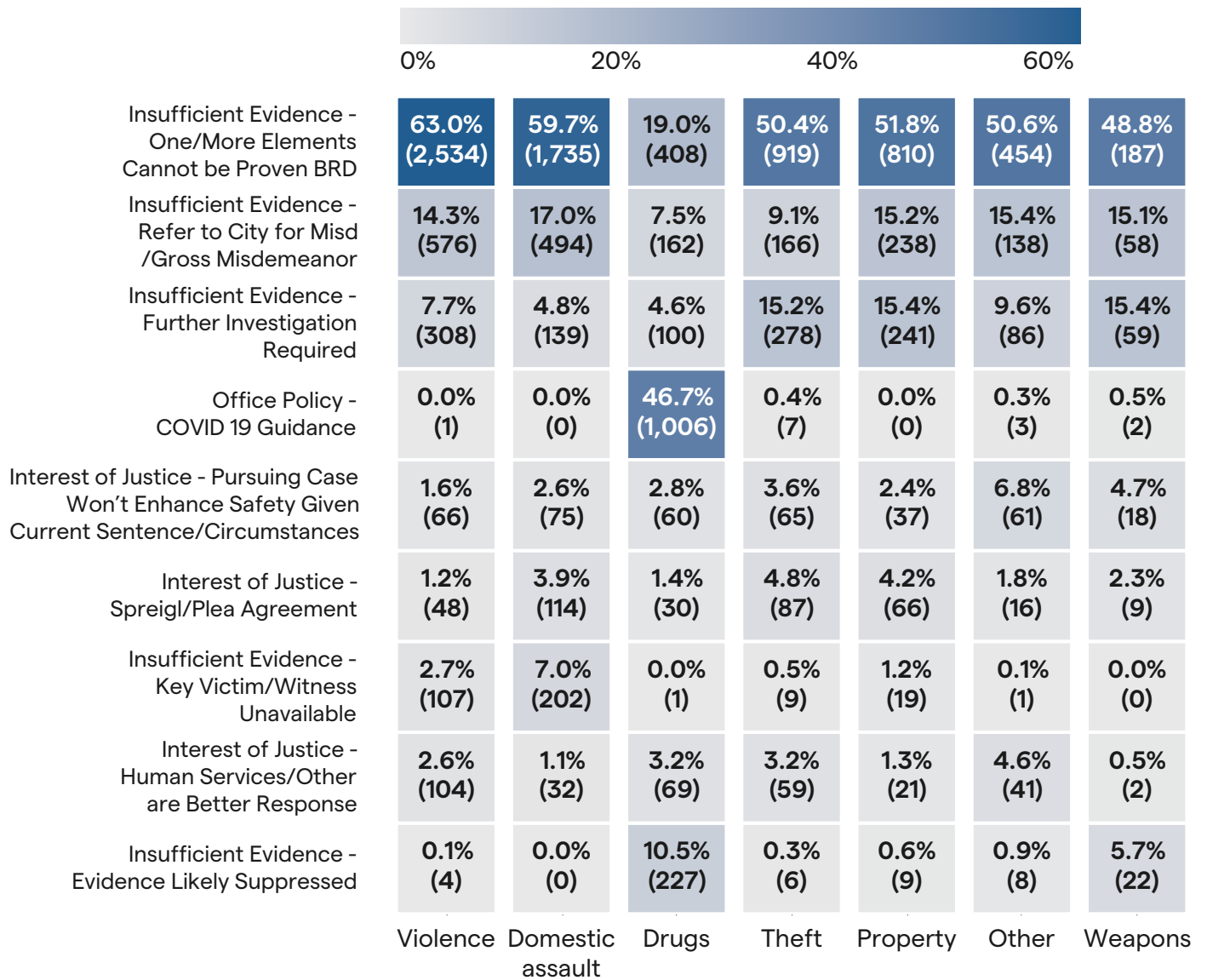
**Figure 8.** Annual case declination rates for all lead charges accounting for at least 2% of declinations overall.

## Declination reasons and charge types

While the previous sections of this report provide separate information on the most common declination reasons and charges, it is also helpful to understand the relationship between different charge types and declination reasons. Figure 9 shows the percentage of declinations within each charge group that are for a given reason, along with the declined case counts. This provides information on which reasons are used most for the different charge categories. For every charge type other than drugs, the most common declination reason is insufficient evidence where one or more elements cannot be proven.

As noted, the ultimate case outcome is unknown for certain declination reasons—“refer to city for misd/gross misdemeanor” and “further investigation required.” These reasons account for a considerable portion of case declinations for certain charge types. Referrals to the City Attorney’s Office occur in 17.0% of domestic violence declinations, 15.2% property declinations, 15.1% of weapons declinations, and 14.3% of violence declinations. Cases where further investigation is required account for 15.4% of property and weapons declinations, and 15.2% of theft declinations.

**Percentage of declinations within each charge group that are for a given reason, with (declined case count) 2018-2024 referrals**



**Figure 9.** Percentage of declinations within each charge group for the most common declination reasons.

# Cases with and without victims

## Declination rates for cases with and without a victim

As identified in the analyses above, violence and domestic assault make up a large proportion of declined charges. The cooperation of victims in these cases, and the evidence that victims provide, impact whether a case is charged or declined. Therefore, JIL performed several analyses related to cases with a victim.

JIL evaluated the declination rate for cases with and without victims. Overall, 73.2% of closed RCAO cases had a victim identified. Declinations are more likely for cases that involve a victim, with 39.5% of disposed cases with a victim being declined compared to 35.4% without a victim (Figure 10). This difference is statistically significant,<sup>7</sup> which aligns with expectations given the high declination rates for domestic assault and violence.

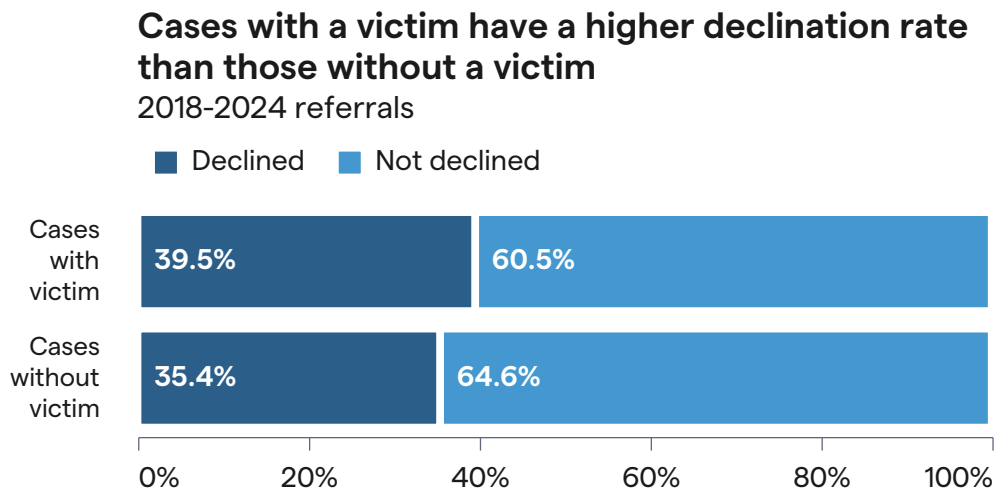


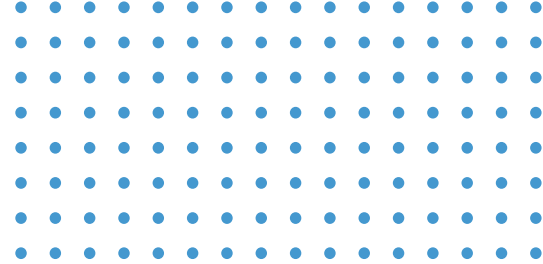
Figure 10. Comparison of declination rates for disposed cases with and without a victim.

## Declined cases with a victim

Among declined cases, the majority, 75.3%, involve a victim. By comparison, 71.9% of charged cases involved a victim. The percentage of declined cases involving a victim has been fairly consistent over time, though there was a 7.8 percentage point increase in declinations with a victim from 2023 (76.0%) to 2024 (83.8%). The percentage of declinations with a victim likely increased in 2024 due to the previously-mentioned legal change that resulted in a decrease in victimless marijuana possession declinations.

The declination reasons used in the greatest number of declined cases with a victim are “one/more elements cannot be proven,” “refer to City for misd/gross misdemeanor,” “further investigation required,” and “key victim/witness unavailable.” Among the top declination reasons, only “COVID 19 guidance” and “evidence likely suppressed,” which are most likely to be used in drug cases (see Figure 9), do not involve a victim in the majority of cases.

<sup>7</sup> The probability that the event happened purely by chance is sufficiently small (i.e., less than 5%) that it can be concluded that there is likely an external explanation for the outcome.

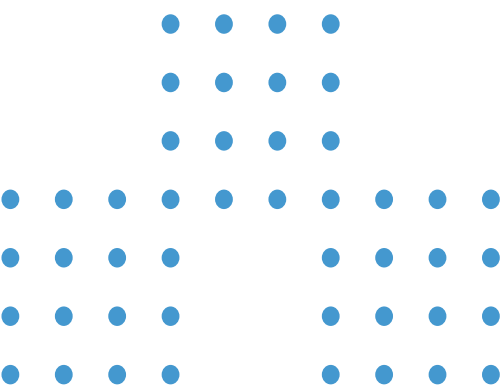


The most common declined charges involve domestic assault, other violence, and theft. Figure 11 shows the relationship between charge type, declination reason, and victim race/ethnicity for declined cases with a victim. Victim race/ethnicity information was available in 73.4% of declinations with a victim, but analysis was limited to the 68.9% of declined victim cases where the victim race/ethnicity was identified as one of the categories shown in Figure 11. Cases with multiple victims of different races, or with a victim race/ethnicity not in one of these categories (e.g., “Multiracial”), were not included in the analysis.

All analyses involving race/ethnicity in this report should be viewed with the knowledge that the number of people in each category varies significantly; therefore, conclusions may not be meaningful for groups with small sample sizes (Asian, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN)).

Each heatmap in Figure 11 shows data for a specific charge. Within each charge heatmap, the percentage of declinations for each reason is provided for the different race/ethnicity groups, along with the number of cases declined for that reason/charge/group. For example, looking at the “Domestic Assault Felony” heatmap, 63.2% of declined cases for this charge, where there is a Black victim, are for insufficient evidence where one or more elements cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. From Figure 11, we see that:

- For felony domestic assault declinations, Asian victims have a relatively high percentage of declinations that are referred to the City Attorney’s Office (28.6%). Black victims have the highest percentage of felony domestic assault declinations attributed to a key victim or witness that is unavailable (12.3%).
- Declinations where further investigation is required are most common in theft cases, with notably high percentages for Hispanic or Latino victims in theft of movable property cases (36.4%), and Black victims in both theft of movable property (19.4%) and theft of motor vehicle (20.0%) cases.
- Among the charges shown, domestic assault by strangulation has the highest percentage of referrals to the City Attorney’s Office for all victim groups, and it is particularly high for Hispanic or Latino victims (56.1%).
- For most victim groups, felony domestic assault is the charge with the most total case declinations. However, for cases with an Asian victim, threats of violence account for the most declinations. For this charge, Asian victims have a higher percentage of cases declined for both referrals to the City Attorney’s Office and further investigation required compared to the other groups, though the sample size is fairly small.



**Percentage of victim cases declined by reason, charge, and victim race/ethnicity group, with (declined case count)**  
2018-2024 referrals



	Black	White	Asian	Hisp/Latino	AI/AN		Black	White	Asian	Hisp/Latino	AI/AN
<b>Domestic Assault Felony</b>						<b>Domestic Assault By Strangulation</b>					
Insufficient Evidence - One/More Elements Cannot be Proven BRD	63.2% (387)	68.4% (240)	54.3% (19)	70.5% (31)	70.0% (21)	54.3% (197)	43.0% (96)	44.1% (15)	39.0% (16)	53.8% (14)	
Insufficient Evidence - Refer to City for Misd/Gross Misdemeanor	10.5% (64)	8.5% (30)	28.6% (10)	18.2% (8)	13.3% (4)	32.8% (119)	43.0% (96)	41.2% (14)	56.1% (23)	38.5% (10)	
Insufficient Evidence - Further Investigation Required	5.9% (36)	7.1% (25)	2.9% (1)	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (8)	3.1% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.8% (1)	
Insufficient Evidence - Key Victim/Witness Unavailable	12.3% (75)	8.5% (30)	8.6% (3)	4.5% (2)	6.7% (2)	6.9% (25)	3.1% (7)	8.8% (3)	2.4% (1)	0.0% (0)	
<b>Threats of Violence</b>						<b>Assault-2nd Degree</b>					
<b>Reckless Disregard Risk</b>						<b>Dangerous Weapon</b>					
Insufficient Evidence - One/More Elements Cannot be Proven BRD	66.1% (191)	54.8% (86)	51.2% (21)	60.9% (14)	68.8% (11)	59.1% (175)	55.5% (61)	35.1% (13)	63.0% (17)	25.0% (3)	
Insufficient Evidence - Refer to City for Misd/Gross Misdemeanor	13.1% (38)	16.6% (26)	24.4% (10)	13.0% (3)	18.8% (3)	12.8% (38)	21.8% (24)	21.6% (8)	25.9% (7)	25.0% (3)	
Insufficient Evidence - Further Investigation Required	5.9% (17)	8.3% (13)	9.8% (4)	8.7% (2)	6.2% (1)	10.5% (31)	5.5% (6)	8.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	8.3% (1)	
Insufficient Evidence - Key Victim/Witness Unavailable	4.5% (13)	3.8% (6)	2.4% (1)	8.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	4.4% (13)	1.8% (2)	2.7% (1)	3.7% (1)	8.3% (1)	
<b>Theft-Take/Drive</b>						<b>Theft-Take/Use/Transfer</b>					
<b>Motor Vehicle-No Owner Consent</b>						<b>Movable Prop-No Consent</b>					
Insufficient Evidence - One/More Elements Cannot be Proven BRD	74.5% (41)	69.3% (79)	69.4% (25)	88.2% (15)	0.0% (0)	72.2% (26)	44.9% (40)	58.3% (7)	63.6% (7)	100.0% (1)	
Insufficient Evidence - Refer to City for Misd/Gross Misdemeanor	1.8% (1)	3.5% (4)	5.6% (2)	5.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	8.3% (3)	11.2% (10)	16.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	
Insufficient Evidence - Further Investigation Required	20.0% (11)	14.9% (17)	11.1% (4)	0.0% (0)	100.0% (1)	19.4% (7)	12.4% (11)	8.3% (1)	36.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	
Insufficient Evidence - Key Victim/Witness Unavailable	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.8% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	

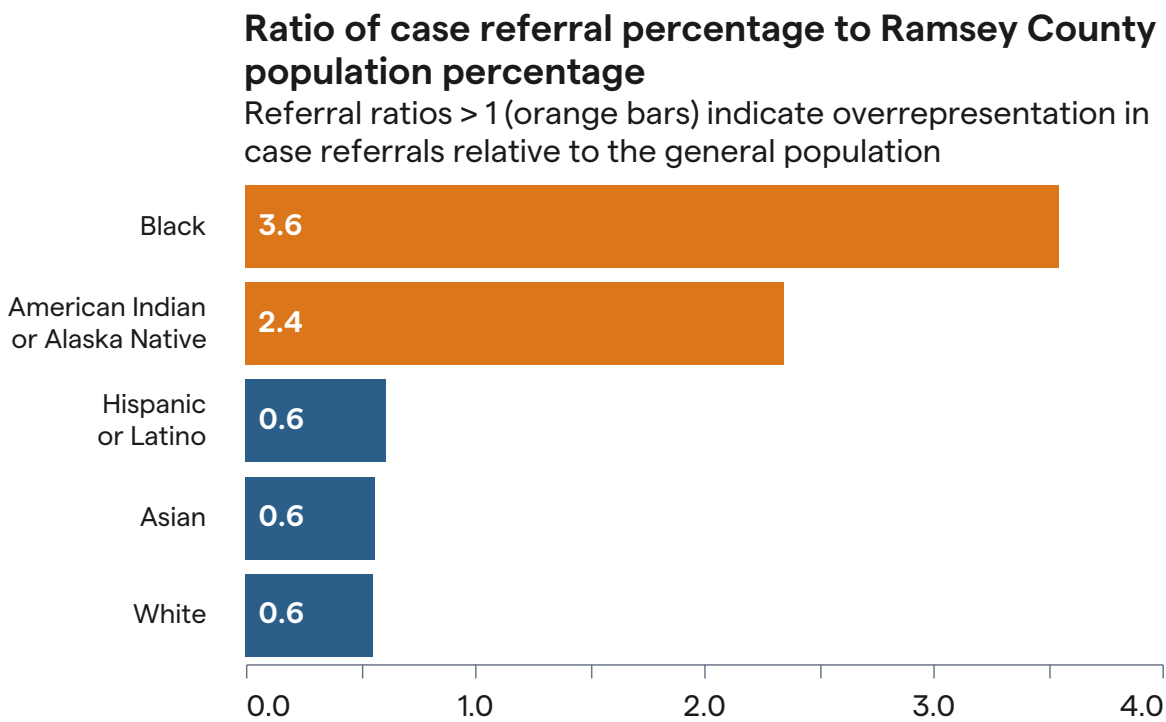
**Figure 11.** Percentage of victim cases declined for the reasons shown, by charge, within each victim race/ethnicity group, for the most prevalent charges in declined cases with a victim.

# Race/ethnicity of referred individuals

JIL also evaluated declinations by the race/ethnicity of individuals with felony case referrals to RCAO. The term “referred individual” is used instead of “arrestee” because not every person whose case is reviewed by RCAO has been arrested. The race/ethnicity information for referred individuals was available in 96.0% of declined cases, with 92.8% of declined cases identifying the individual’s race/ethnicity in one of the categories shown in Figure 12. As with the victim analysis, the number of people in each group varies significantly; therefore, conclusions may not be meaningful for groups with small sample sizes.

## Case referral rates relative to the general population

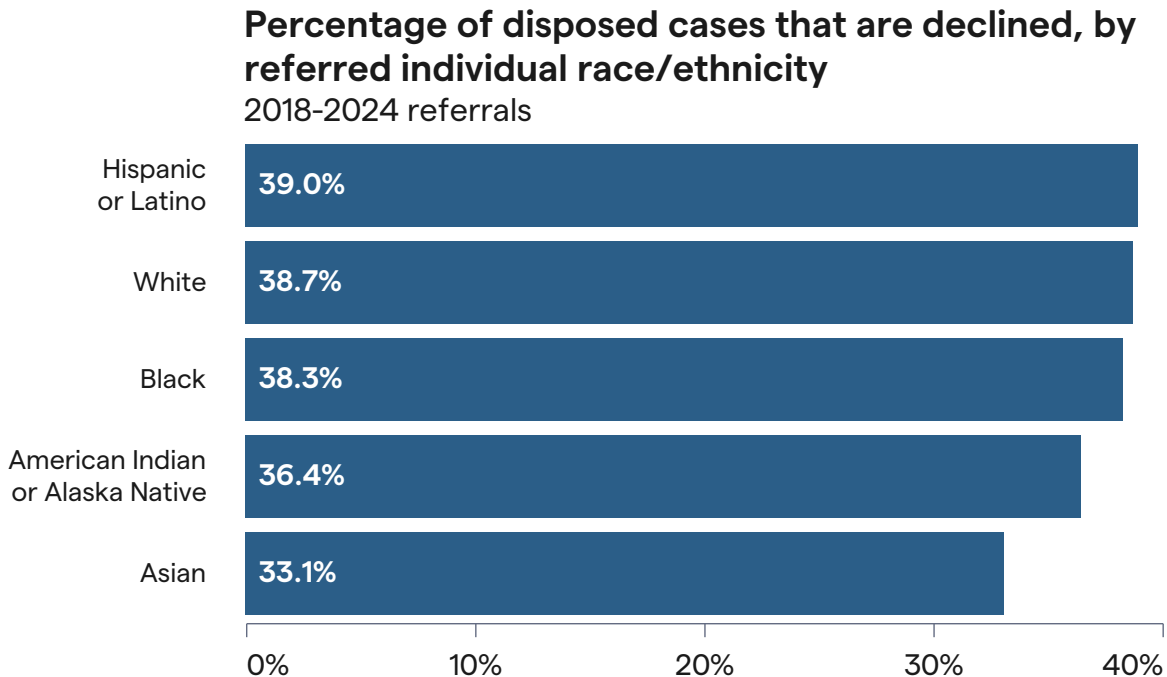
To understand the role of race/ethnicity in criminal legal data, it is important to understand relative case referral rates. Figure 12 shows the ratio of referral rate (the percentage of individuals of a given race/ethnicity out of all case referrals to RCAO) to population rate (the percentage of people of a given race/ethnicity in the general population) for the most common groups in Ramsey County, MN. The data show that Black and American Indian or Alaska Native people are referred at disproportionately higher rates compared to their population percentage. As shown below, the percentage of referred arrestees who are Black (50%) is 3.6 times greater than the [general population percentage](#) for Black people in Ramsey County (14%).



**Figure 12.** Ratio of case referral percentage to Ramsey County population percentage, by race/ethnicity of referred individuals.

## Overall declination rates

JIL examined the percentage of disposed cases that are declined by race/ethnicity (Figure 13). The overall declination rates range from 33.1% for referred Asian individuals to 39.0% for referred Hispanic or Latino individuals.



**Figure 13.** Overall case declination rates by referred individual race/ethnicity group.

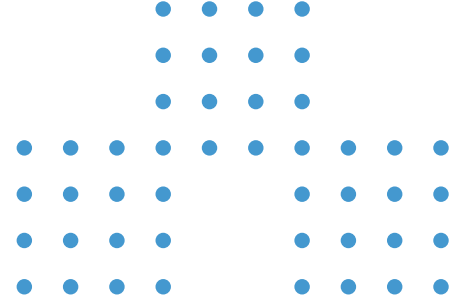
## Declination rates for specific charges

JIL also explored potential racial differences in declination rates for the most prevalent declined charges. Figure 14 shows declination rates, by referred individual race/ethnicity, for the charges with the most declinations.

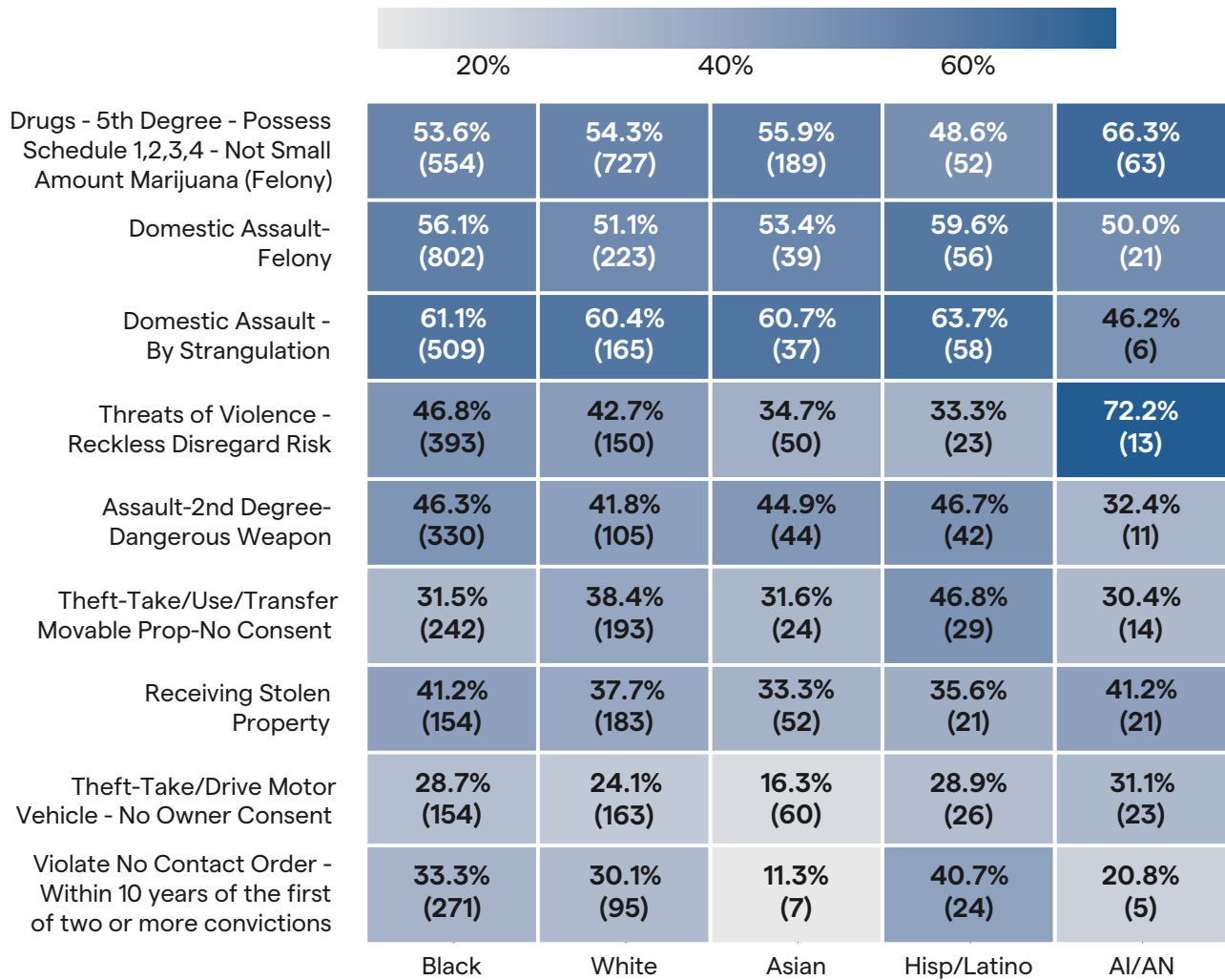
American Indian or Alaska Native individuals have uniquely high declination rates for multiple charges, felony marijuana possession (66.3%) and threats of violence (72.2%), while referred Asian individuals have relatively low declination rates for motor vehicle theft (16.3%) and no contact order violations (11.3%). However, solid conclusions cannot be drawn from these statistics since the number of cases is low for these populations.

Comparing the two largest population groups, Black and White people:

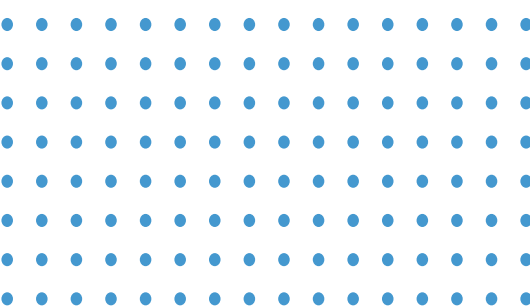
- White individuals only have notably higher declination rates than Black individuals for theft of movable property (38.4% vs 31.5%). This is the only charge where the difference is statistically significant.
- Declination rates are similar between Black and White people for felony marijuana possession (53.6% vs 54.3%) and domestic assault by strangulation (61.1% vs 60.4%).
- Referred Black individuals have higher declination rates than referred White individuals for most of the top declined charges: felony domestic assault (56.1% vs 51.1%), threats of violence (46.8% vs 42.7%), 2nd degree assault with a dangerous weapon (46.3% vs 41.8%), receiving stolen property (41.2% vs 37.7%), motor vehicle theft (28.7% vs 24.1%), and no contact order violations (33.3% vs 30.1%).



**Declination rates for specific charges, by referred individual race/ethnicity, with (declined case counts)**  
2018-2024 referrals



**Figure 14.** Declination rates for the most commonly-declined charges, by referred individual race/ethnicity.



# Time-to-disposition

## Overall time-to-disposition

Finally, JIL assessed the time it takes to close declined cases, from referral date to disposition date. For the time-to-disposition calculations, the 158 case declinations involving alternatives to charging were excluded since the required diversion programming extends disposition times beyond what is typical for all other declinations. For cases declined from 2019 through 2024, the overall mean time-to-disposition is 48 days, while the median is 6 days. Figure 15 shows time trends in the mean number of days it takes to decline cases. Declined cases typically took longer to resolve in 2020, which corresponds to delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic, though there were also some atypically high disposition times in 2019. There was also an uptick in time-to-disposition for declined cases in 2024 compared to the three years prior.

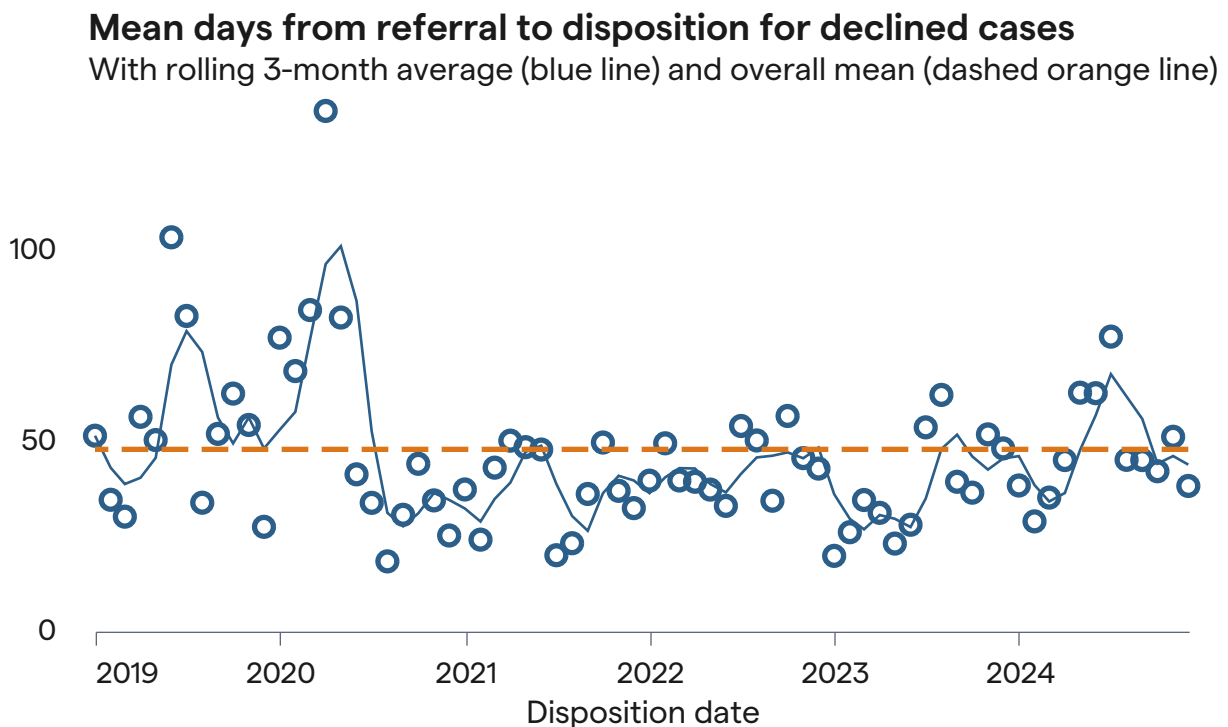


Figure 15. Mean days to decline cases over time, by disposition date.

## Time-to-disposition by declination reason

Figure 16 shows the difference between the mean and median disposition times for the most common declination reasons. Declinations in the interest of justice where “human services/other are better response” have the longest mean and median declination times, as well as the largest difference between the mean and median, potentially due to variability in the types of cases that may be declined for this reason, as well as relatively low numbers of declined cases (see Figure 9). Other “interest of justice” declinations (Spreigl/plea agreement, pursuing case won’t enhance safety) also take a relatively long time from referral to disposition. Insufficient evidence declinations are generally handled more quickly.



## Mean and median days to disposition for declined cases, by declination reason

2018-2024 referrals

● Mean ■ Median

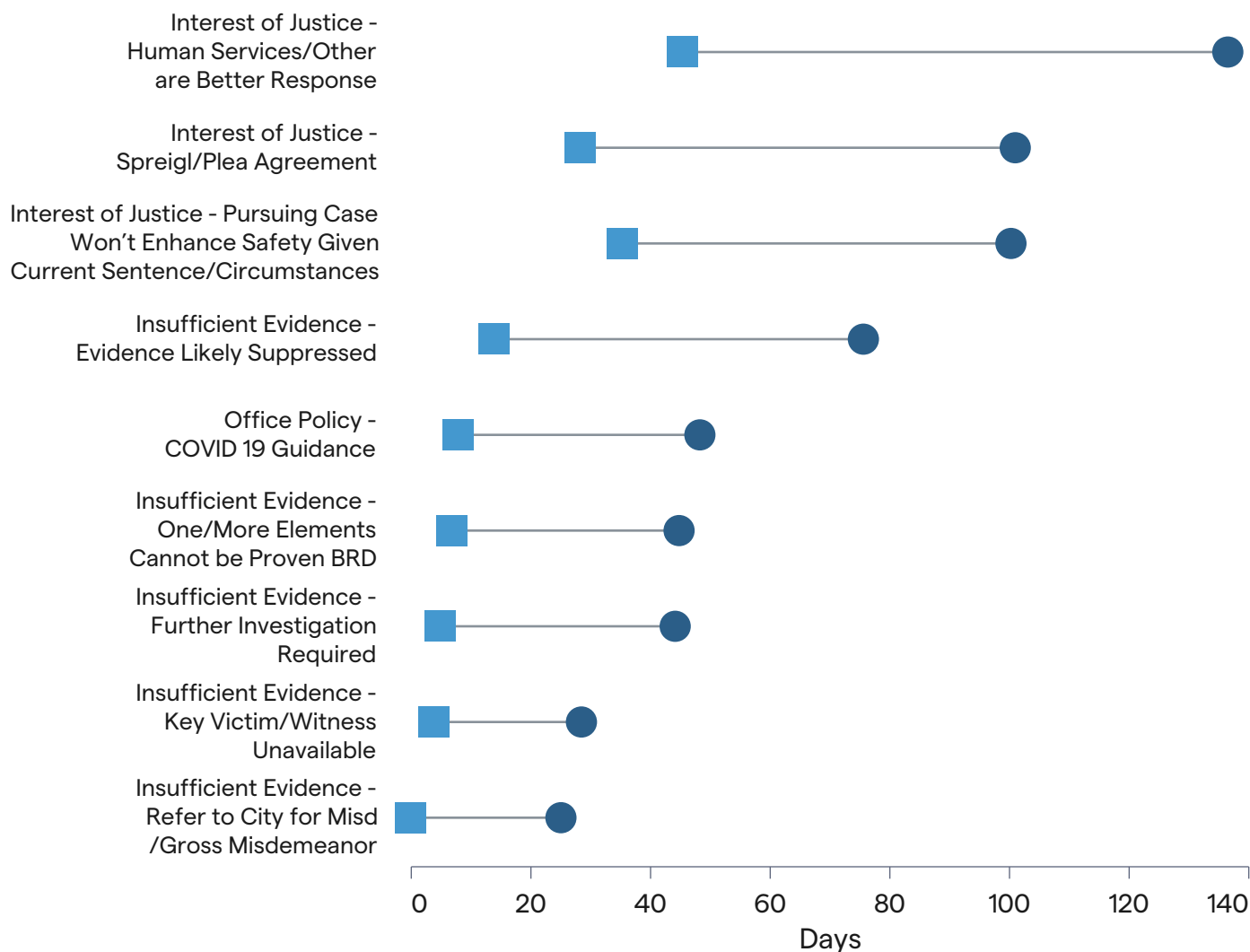
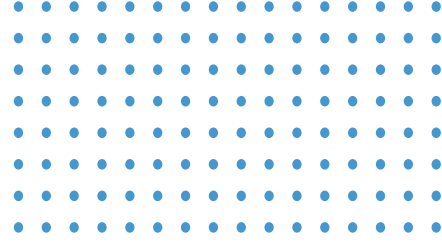


Figure 16. Mean and median days to decline cases, by declination reason.

## Time to disposition for specific charges

JIL also analyzed the time it takes to decline specific charges. Of the charges with the most declined cases, theft of movable property takes by far the longest time to decline, with a median time-to-disposition of 55 days and a mean of 99 days (Figure 17). All other top declined charges had a considerably lower median number of days to disposition, with domestic assault charges being declined most quickly. There are a number of factors that can contribute to differences in the time to decline cases, including the volume of time-sensitive referrals (where someone is in custody), required follow-up investigations, and prosecutor caseloads.



### Mean and median days to disposition for declined cases, by referred lead charge

2018-2024 referrals

● Mean ■ Median

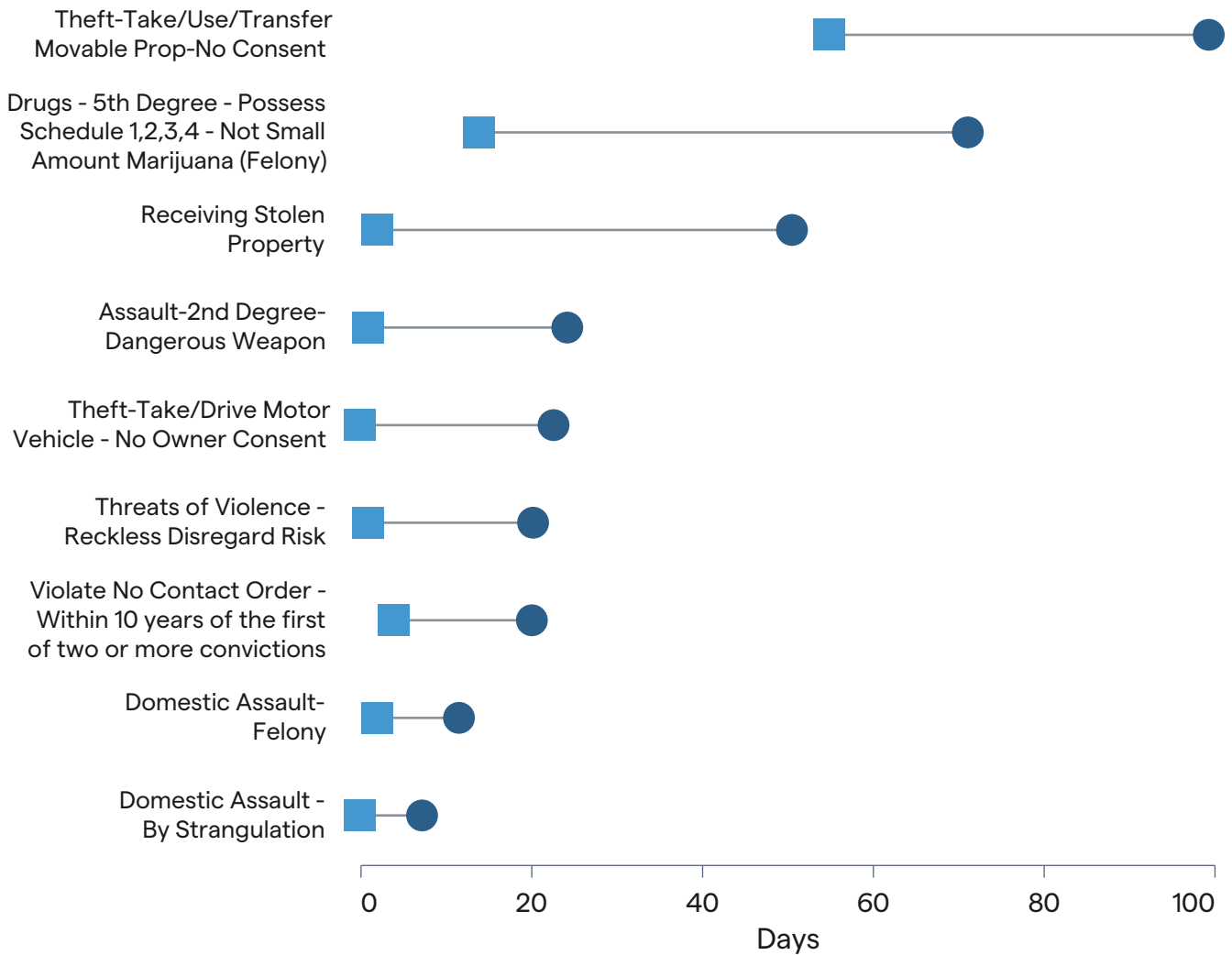
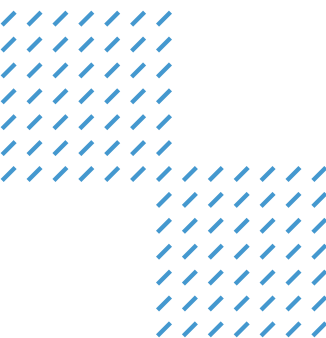


Figure 17. Mean and median days to decline cases, by lead charge.



# Conclusion

JIL analyzed RCOA declination data for cases referred between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2024, that were closed by September 9, 2025, and identified the primary results listed below. These analyses provide an overview of various facets of case declinations in Ramsey County and identify several potential focus areas for future study, such as whether additional communication is needed for cases where further investigation is required, and why it takes considerably longer to decline cases in the interest of justice than for other reasons.

## General results

- Overall, 13,749 cases were declined, accounting for 38.4% of disposed cases. Declinations peaked in 2020, during COVID-19 lockdowns, and were lowest in 2023, potentially due to a plan by the State court to resolve COVID-induced case backlogs by the end of that year. Following three years of decreases, there was an increase in both the number and rate of declinations in 2024.

## Declination reasons

- Insufficient evidence is overwhelmingly the most common reason for a case to be declined. Of all declined cases, 80.4% are declined for insufficient evidence, and 51.3% of declinations are attributed to the specific reason that one or more elements cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.
- For the 8.8% of declinations due to further investigation being required, there is an opportunity for RCOA and law enforcement to develop a communication loop to ensure that further investigation efforts are made and completed investigations are resubmitted.

## Declined charges

- Violence (non-domestic) is the most common declined charge category, accounting for 29.3% of all declined cases, followed by domestic assault at 21.1%. Cases with a weapons lead charge account for the fewest declinations, 2.8%.
- The declination rate is highest for domestic assault charges, with 50.2% of all disposed domestic assault cases being declined. This is followed closely by violence and drugs, each with a 47.6% declination rate.
- In terms of specific criminal charges, two domestic assault charges, domestic assault by strangulation and felony domestic assault, have declinations in over half of all disposed cases.

## Declined cases with victims

- The majority of declinations (75.3%) involve a victim, consistent with violence and domestic assault accounting for over half of all declinations.
- There is a statistically significant difference in declination rates between cases with and without victims. Declinations are more likely for cases that involve a victim, with 39.5% of disposed cases with a victim being declined compared to 35.4% without a victim.
- Among the most commonly-declined charges, domestic assault by strangulation has the highest percentage of referrals to the City Attorney's Office for all victim race/ethnicity groups.

## Race/ethnicity of referred individuals

- The overall declination rates by race/ethnicity range from 33.1% for Asian individuals to 39.0% for Hispanic or Latino individuals. Black and White individuals have similar declination rates, at 38.3% and 38.7%, respectively.
- Referred Black individuals have appreciably higher declination rates than referred White individuals for most of the top declined charges. The only commonly-declined charge for which White individuals have a higher declination rate is theft of movable property, where there is a statistically significant difference in declination rates for White (38.4%) and Black (31.5%) individuals.

## Time-to-disposition

- For declined cases overall, the mean time-to-dispositions is 48 days, while the median is 6 days.
- Insufficient evidence cases tend to be declined quickly, while cases declined in the interest of justice take longer.
- Theft of movable property takes considerably longer to decline compared to other cases, with a median of 55 days and a mean of 99 days. Domestic assault cases have the fastest declinations.

# Appendix

## Declination reason groupings

Table A1 shows how specific declination reasons were grouped into general declination categories for analysis. The number of cases for each declination category and specific declination reason are shown in parentheses, for cases referred between January 1, 2018 and December 31st, 2024 that were closed by September 9, 2025. The declination categories are shown in descending order of total cases; the majority of declinations fall within the insufficient evidence category.

It is important to note that updates were made to the declination reasons used by RCO in mid-2022. At that point, RCO discontinued use of a generic "Refusal" declination reason and implemented a set of more detailed descriptions to identify the specific rationale for declining a charge. From that point forward, reviewing attorneys selected the description that most accurately reflected the basis for their decision. For cases declined prior to this change, RCO interns reviewed the attorneys' contemporaneous notes and assigned the declination reason that most appropriately aligned with the information recorded. The fact that declination reasons for cases declined prior to mid-2022 were not selected by the original reviewing attorney should be taken into account when considering any differences in the use of declination reasons over time.

**Table A1.** Declination groupings and case counts

Declination category	Declination reason
<b>Insufficient evidence (11,054)</b>	One/More Elements Cannot be Proven BRD (7,047)
	Refer to City for Misd/Gross Misdemeanor (1,832)
	Further Investigation Required (1,211)
	Key Victim/Witness Unavailable (339)
	Evidence Likely Suppressed (276)
	Can't Disprove Affirmative Defense (196)
	Ramsey County Improper Venue (152)
	Brady (1)
<b>Interest of justice (1,240)</b>	Pursuing Case Won't Enhance Safety Given Current Sentence/ Circumstances (382)
	Spreigl/Plea Agreement (370)
	Human Services/Other are Better Response (328)
	Other (158)
<b>COVID-19 (1,032)</b>	Office Policy - COVID 19 Guidance (1,019)
	Refused for COVID19 (13)

Table A1 continued. Declination groupings and case counts

Declination category	Declination reason
<b>Refusal (no longer in use) (180)</b>	Not Charged (139)
	Referred to City Atty - Misd, GrossMisd (20)
	Further Investigation Needed (11)
	Facts/Circumstances Don't Support Charges (7)
	Prosecution Not in Best Interest of Justice (3)
<b>Alternatives to charging (158)</b>	Successful Pre-Charge Diversion (148)
	Adult Restorative Justice - Completed (6)
	Restorative Justice Circle Completed (3)
	Adult Precharge SCI Completed (1)
<b>Prosecution legally barred (66)</b>	Statute of Limitations (40)
	Double Jeopardy (22)
	Offense Already Charged Under Different CN (3)
	Statute of Limitations (1)
<b>Traffic stop policy (18)</b>	Office Policy - NPS Traffic Stop (18)
<b>Other (1)</b>	Office Policy - Small Amount of Marijuana (1)

# Charge groupings

The charge groups used in this report, along with the five most common declined lead charges in each grouping, are shown in Table A2. The text used in the table for each specific charge matches the referred charge descriptions in the data. The number of cases for each charge group and specific charge are shown in parentheses, for cases referred between January 1, 2018 and December 31st, 2024 that were closed by September 9, 2025. The totals in the charge group column reflect all declined cases in each category, not just the top five shown.

**Table A2.** Charge groupings and declined case counts for the top five declined charges per group

Charge group	Most common declined lead charge
<b>Violence (4,023)</b>	Threats of Violence - Reckless Disregard Risk (679)
	Assault-2nd Degree-Dangerous Weapon (571)
	Assault-3rd Degree-Substantial Bodily Harm (217)
	Terroristic Threats-Reckless Disregard Risk (196)
	Aggravated Robbery-1st Degree (177)
<b>Domestic assault (2,905)</b>	Domestic Assault-Felony (1,183)
	Domestic Assault - By Strangulation (818)
	Violate No Contact Order - Within 10 years of the first of two or more convictions (411)
	Domestic Abuse - Violate Order for Protection (255)
	Domestic Abuse; Violates 2 or more OFPW/in 10 years of previous conviction/adj of delinq. (156)
<b>Drugs (2,153)</b>	Drugs - 5th Degree - Possess Schedule 1,2,3,4 - Not Small Amount Marijuana (Felony) (1,702)
	Drugs - 5th Degree - Possess Schedule 1,2,3,4 or paraphernalia residual - Not cannabis/hemp (188)
	Drugs - 3rd Degree - Possess 10 grams or more a narcotic drug other than heroin (33)
	Drugs - 1st Degree - Possess 50 grams or more - cocaine or methamphetamine (28)
	Drugs - 5th Degree - Sale - Marijuana mixture except small amount of marijuana with no remuneration (27)
<b>Theft (1,824)</b>	Theft-Take/Use/Transfer Movable Prop-No Consent (548)
	Theft-Take/Drive Motor Vehicle-No Owner Consent (449)
	Financial Transaction Card Fraud-Use-No Consent (195)
	Check Forgery-Make or Alter a Check (137)
	Check Forgery-Offer/Possess W/Intent to Defraud (126)

**Table A2 continued.** Charge groupings and declined case counts for the top five declined charges per group

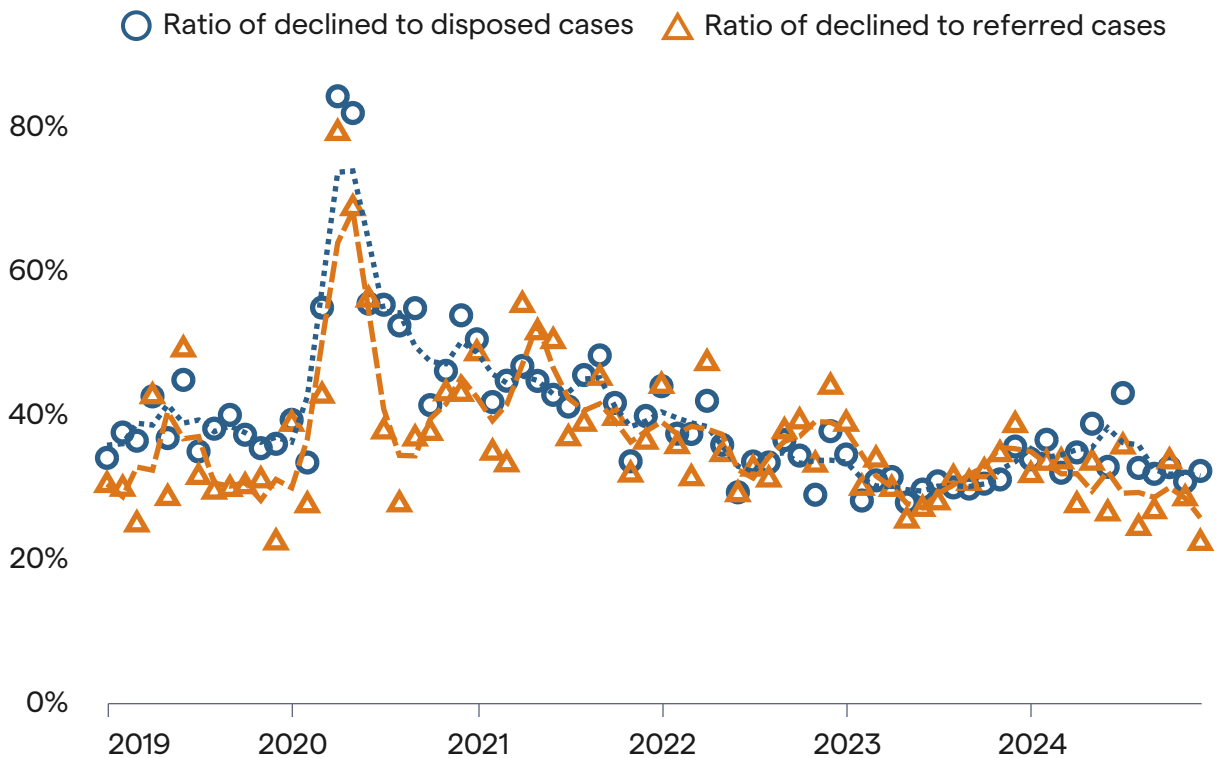
Charge group	Most common declined lead charge
<b>Property (1,563)</b>	Receiving Stolen Property (464)
	Damage to Property - 1st Degree - Value Reduced Over \$1000 (256)
	Burglary-3rd Deg-Steal/Commit Felony or Gross Misd (235)
	Burglary-2nd Degree-Dwelling (131)
	Burglary-1st Degree (119)
<b>Other (898)</b>	Fleeing a Peace Officer in a Motor Vehicle (219)
	Possession of Burglary or Theft Tools (133)
	Predatory Offender - Knowingly commits act or fails to fulfill registration requirement (71)
	Registration and Eligibility of Voters - Register an ineligible voter (36)
	Nonconsensual dissemination of private sexual images - Intentionally disseminate image w/out consent (Felony) (24)
<b>Weapons (383)</b>	Possesses any type of firearm/ammo - Crime of Violence - ineligible under 624.713.1 (163)
	Possess Ammo/Any Firearm - Conviction or Adjudicated Delinquent for Crime of Violence (76)
	Dangerous Weapons-Reckless Discharge of Firearm Within a Municipality (54)
	Carry/Possess Pistol w/out Permit - Public Place - Gross Misdemeanor; Second or Subsequent - Felony (17)
	Tear Gas/Stun Gun-Prohibited Possess/Use (13)

# Declinations by referral and disposition dates

When analyzing declination time trends throughout the report, disposition dates are used instead of referral dates, because using disposition dates limits analysis to cases with a known outcome as of a given date. If referral dates were used, comparisons could be less accurate since cases that were referred may not yet be closed. However, since there is also interest in outcomes tied to referral dates, Figure A1 was created to provide additional context to how declination rates based on referral and disposition dates compare over time.

Figure A1 shows monthly declination rates calculated two different ways: the ratio of declined cases to disposed cases, and the ratio of declined cases to referred cases. The trends are similar for both data series, so it is not expected that there would be major differences in results based on the declination rate calculation method used.

## Comparison of declination rates based on disposition dates and referral dates over time, with 3-month rolling averages



**Figure A1.** Declination rates based on disposition dates and referral dates over time, with rolling 3-month average.

**Understand the world as it is.  
Imagine the world as it could be.  
Do justice.**



**Justice  
Innovation  
Lab**