

Proposed Administrative Ordinance Change Community Engagement and Racial Equity Summary

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY

Stakeholders were identified by regulated activity group, with an emphasis on identifying and successfully reaching out to small/locally owned license holders and non-native English speakers/writers. Based on regulatory staff's experience working with these organizations over the years, a straightforward online survey was the primary engagement tool chosen, plus the option to participate in one of three virtual listening sessions with identical content.

To encourage and support participation, all licensees or regulated businesses with an email address on file were invited by, or on behalf of, their Ramsey County inspector; this group included 1428 unique invitees. Eleven licensees did not have an address on file and were sent surveys by mail along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Unique survey response collectors were set up for each group of licensees, and response numbers were actively tracked so staff could do additional outreach as needed. Regulatory staff also identified businesses with potential language barriers; those were contacted directly to determine whether they needed additional support to participate. Two requested materials in their home language (Chinese and Spanish) and those were provided.

Three listening sessions were held on August 17 at 6pm, August 18 at 2pm, and August 19 at 9am. Information to be presented and questions asked during the listening sessions were identical to the online survey. No stakeholders attended any of these listening sessions.

There were 186 responses to the online survey and one mailed survey response. Responses were collected August 10 through September 6, 2021.

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Some clear themes emerged from the community engagement results:

- There was overwhelming support for the proposed change to add a civil citation before the misdemeanor criminal citation; commonly cited reasons included the following:
 - The civil (non-criminal) enforcement tool better aligns with the nature of the regulations.

- This approach is more likely to motivate compliance by regulated entities, thus reducing risk to the public.
- A wider range of enforcement options may increase county education and enforcement efforts.
- A general desire for more information and education about county rules, enforcement processes and potential fine amounts from a civil citation.
- More and clearer opportunities to correct violations before enforcement, and clearer guidance from county staff on how to do that.
- An appeals request timeframe longer than the proposed 10 days.
- Assurance that the appeals hearing officer would be unbiased, knowledgeable about the regulated businesses, and selected with consideration to racial diversity and professional background.

Some of these are already addressed by existing county enforcement policies, while others provide useful guidance to refine the proposed ordinance and improve the county's regulatory education and outreach processes.

RACIAL EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Because of the existing racial inequities inherent to the criminal justice system, creating a decriminalized ordinance enforcement option gives the Public Health Department a tool that can be used to protect public health, while minimizing regulatory enforcement impacts on regulated businesses that are owned or operated by people from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

There are instances where community members from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds have been issued misdemeanor citations for county ordinance violations in the past. This change would have provided the business owners from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds who were impacted at that time with another chance for compliance before they were charged with a misdemeanor citation.

The public health regulations in Ramsey County ordinances provide protections for the health of the community and the natural environment. The proposed changes strike a reasonable balance between fair and equitable enforcement of ordinances and adequate protection of our community's health and environment.

MORE INFORMATION

A copy of the complete community engagement compilation and analysis report and details about the proposed ordinance revisions can be found here: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/ordinances-regulations/public-health-ordinance-changes>