

# OFFICE OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Ramsey County Attorney's Office files charges in Columbus statue incident**

*Will engage community in holistic restorative justice process, bringing divergent perspectives together to understand the harm caused and determine how best to repair it*

Saint Paul, MN – After careful review of an extensive investigation by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), the Ramsey County Attorney's Office today charged Michael Anthony Forcia with one count of felony Criminal Damage to Property in connection with the leveling of the Christopher Columbus statue on the grounds of the Minnesota State Capitol on June 10. At the time, Forcia acknowledged that he would likely be held accountable for his actions in organizing the protest that led to the statue being pulled down by protesters. While charges against other participants remain a possibility, it was clear from the information revealed in the more than 13,000-page investigative file that Mr. Forcia was the primary organizer, leader, and executor of the incident.

“Given the impact of this action on residents across our state and the divisive reactions it has engendered, we believe administering justice in this case requires an extraordinary step -- the active engagement and participation of our community,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “We are working on developing a restorative process to give voice to those divergent opinions and bring people who hold them together to determine how best we hold Mr. Forcia accountable while healing our community from the harm that was caused. By employing restorative principles in a way that unites rather than divides us, we have a greater opportunity to achieve true justice for our community, to respond more meaningfully and in due time, rather than waiting more than a year for an adversarial trial that would not provide adequate closure for our community and likely create additional division. The pursuit of justice should always seek to unite a community rather than divide it.”

According to the complaint, on the morning of June 10, the Minnesota State Patrol received information that Forcia organized a 5 p.m. event via social media entitled, “AIM rally against racism! Bring your drums!” It was clear from the post that the event's purpose was to remove the statue.

When troopers arrived at the site by 4 p.m., they observed two individuals by the statue. One, Forcia, declared they were there to “pull the statue down.” Captain Eric Roeske informed Forcia about the process for removing or changing monuments on the Capitol complex, even offering him a copy of Minnesota Statute 15B which outlines the process. Forcia stated they had been

through many processes before and that they were “taking it down today.” By 4:52 p.m. a large crowd had gathered and by 5:01 p.m. the statue was pulled to the ground.

In follow-up interviews with the BCA, Forcia identified himself as the A.I.M. of the Twin Cities & A.I.M. Patrol Minneapolis Chairman. His stated hope was to have the statue removed as part of a larger effort to teach others about racism. He declined to name others involved in the protest on June 10. Interviews with national A.I.M. leaders revealed that they did not sanction the protest nor was Forcia affiliated with their organization. The estimated cost to repair the damage is \$154,553.

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Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.