

Sample note: While editing this, I took extra care to make sure the story was put in proper context. I made sure to link to KC Star stories about some of the hate incidents mentioned, and I included videos that ran with those stories as well to create a complete package. I wrote the headline and edited the metadata for this story, which were key elements that helped it perform exceptionally well on search engines — at one point if you searched "NAACP," this was the first news story to pop up.



NAACP issues travel advisory for Missouri 2:02

LOCAL

NAACP issues first-ever travel advisory for a state — and it’s Missouri

BY IAN CUMMINGS
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AUGUST 01, 2017 5:49 PM

NAACP officials say their recent travel advisory for Missouri is the first that the civil rights group has issued for any state. But the warning follows a recent trend of similar alerts issued by other groups for vulnerable people around the United States. The travel advisory, circulated in June by the Missouri NAACP and recently taken up by the national organization, comes after travel alerts began appearing in recent years in light of police shootings in the U.S. and ahead of immigration legislation in Texas and Arizona.

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The Missouri travel advisory is the first time an NAACP conference has ever made one state the subject of a warning about discrimination and racist attacks, a spokesman for the national organization said Tuesday.

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Missouri became the first because of recent legislation making discrimination lawsuits harder to win, and in response to longtime racial disparities in traffic enforcement and a spate of incidents cited as examples of harm coming to minority residents and visitors, say state NAACP leaders.

Those incidents included racial slurs against black students at the University of Missouri and the death earlier this year of 28-year-old Tory Sanders, a black man from Tennessee who took a wrong turn while traveling and died in a southeast Missouri jail even though he hadn't been accused of a crime.

"How do you come to Missouri, run out of gas and find yourself dead in a jail cell when you haven't broken any laws?" asked Rod Chapel, the president of the Missouri NAACP.

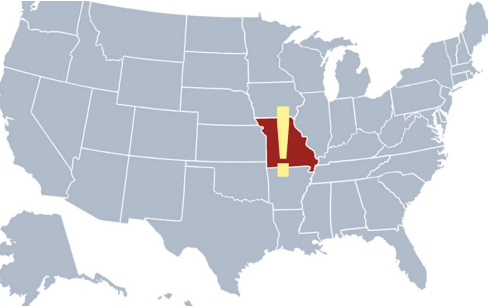
"You have violations of civil rights that are happening to people. They're being pulled over because of their skin color, they're being beaten up or killed," Chapel said. "We are hearing complaints at a rate we haven't heard before."

At the same time, Chapel said, the state government is throwing up barriers to people seeking justice in the courts for discrimination. The travel advisory cites legislation signed by Gov. Eric Greitens that will make it more difficult to sue for housing or employment discrimination.

Asked about the travel advisory on Friday in Kansas City, Greitens said he hadn't seen it yet. His office did not return messages seeking comment on Tuesday.

The new law on discrimination lawsuits takes effect Aug. 28, and Chapel urged people to file any complaints they have before then.

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Chapel, who was silenced by a Missouri House committee chairman while speaking against the legislation earlier this year, said he was especially alarmed that the University of Missouri System backed an earlier version of the bill.

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The NAACP’s advisory also cites the most recent attorney general’s report showing black drivers in Missouri were 75 percent more likely to be pulled over than whites. Those reports have been showing the disparity since the attorney general began releasing the data in 2000.

In May, the owner of a Blue Springs barbershop found his shop windows stained with racial slurs. The same two words appeared on three separate windows in black paint: “Die (N-word).”



Victims of racial slurs in Blue Springs speak out

Victims of recent racial slurs speak out at meeting with the Blue Springs Human Relations Commission.

Rich Sugg - The Kansas City Star

Last week, national NAACP delegates voted to adopt the travel advisory, sending it to the national board for ratification in October.

“The advisory is for people to be aware, and warn their families and friends and co-workers of what could happen in Missouri,” Chapel said. “People need to be ready, whether it’s bringing bail money with them, or letting relatives know they are traveling through the state.”

Travel advisories

Traditionally, travel advisories come from the U.S. State Department to warn citizens of current dangers in all corners of the world. The department this year has issued more than 40 advisories alerting travelers to political instability, violence and hurricanes in various countries.

While the Missouri travel advisory may be a first for the NAACP, other groups have issued similar warnings around the country, often to draw attention to dangers faced by minorities.

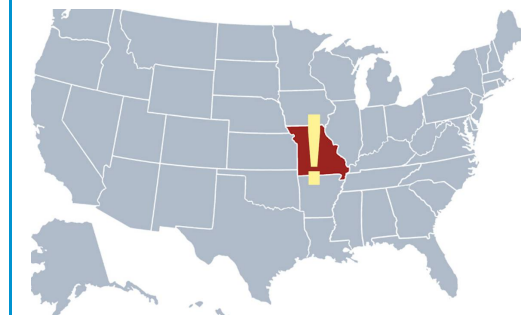
In 2016, the government of the Bahamas issued a travel advisory for the United States, urging its citizens to be careful when traveling in the U.S. and to exercise caution, especially when interacting with police.

The advisory from the Caribbean nation, which is 91 percent black, came soon after fatal shootings of black men by police in Louisiana and Minnesota.

In May, the American Civil Liberties Union issued a travel advisory for Texas, warning travelers of “possible violation of their constitutional rights when stopped by law enforcement.”

The alert came with the passing of a Texas law punishing local law enforcement for not detaining people on immigration violations, which the ACLU said would lead to police asking for immigration papers during routine traffic stops and widespread racial profiling.

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NAACP's warning of racial profiling, abuse in Missouri gives would-be travelers pause

The ACLU had issued a similar advisory in 2010 when Arizona passed its own immigration enforcement law.

“We don’t issue them lightly,” said Edgar Saldivar, a senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Texas. “I think it serves the function of alerting people to what’s going on in the states where they’re traveling, but also advising people of their rights.”

Missouri problems

Missouri reported 100 hate crimes in 2015, the most recent year statistics were available from the FBI’s hate crime reporting program. That put the state at 16th in the country, though not all law enforcement agencies participate in the program.

The Kansas City Star has joined a collaborative reporting project with ProPublica and journalists from nearly 40 news organizations across the country to create a national database of hate crimes.

To understand the danger to travelers, one need only look at what happened to Sanders, Chapel said.

Sanders had left his Nashville home on May 4 to go for a drive but got lost and mistakenly drove into Missouri, where he ran out of gas.

He hitchhiked and eventually ended up in the small Mississippi County town of Charleston, where he approached police to ask for help. Sanders reportedly suffered from mental illness and asked police to see a counselor. He told police he had a warrant for his arrest in Nashville.

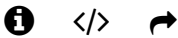
Police took Sanders to the jail for a mental evaluation. A mental health professional examined him and said he could be released. The arrest warrant didn’t allow for him to be extradited to Tennessee authorities. Police planned to let him go.

But for reasons that remain unclear, Sanders continued to experience mental distress and did not want to leave his cell. Another mental health evaluation recommended that Sanders be held for 96 hours.

A series of conflicts between Sanders and jail staff followed, during which staff reportedly shocked Sanders with a stun gun at least three times and used pepper spray on him. Sanders collapsed and was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Sanders’ death is being investigated by the Missouri Highway Patrol. Missouri Attorney General Josh Hawley had previously charged the sheriff responsible for the jail with numerous crimes in separate cases and had him removed from office during the Sanders investigation.

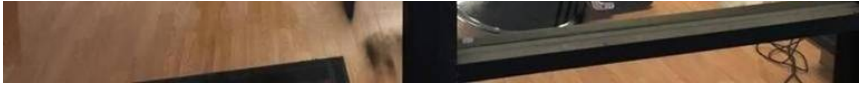
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Beer Hour with Urban League President/CEO Gwen Grant

Gwen Grant, the president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City and the first female CEO in the organization’s history, chatted with reporter Katy Bergen Thursday, Aug. 3, 2017 at Spokes Cafe & Cyclery in Quality Hill. In this clip, Grant reflects on the recently-issued NAACP travel advisory for Missouri.





The NAACP moved forward this week with a Missouri travel advisory due to discrimination issues. A Blue Springs found “Die (N-word)” painted on his windows in May. **Rich Sugg** rsugg@kcstar.com

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