

Evers calls for legislative action on bill overhauling police policies on deadly force

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 3, 2020

Amid a wave of protests around Wisconsin sparked by the death of George Floyd, Gov. Tony Evers today is calling on state lawmakers to quickly pass legislation that would require law enforcement agencies to adopt new policies stating deadly force only be used as a last resort.

In a more than four-minute video, Evers on Tuesday said Floyd's death in Minneapolis from a police officer kneeling on his neck and the "lives taken before him" are symptomatic of the country's failure to address the disease of racism for more than four centuries.

He called passing AB 1012 a first step by "prioritizing preserving life and minimizing the use of force." Still, he said the "solution to racism isn't in one bill or one person."

"We must lay bare the notion that this is not who we are. It is who we have been. It is who we are, but it is not who we have to be tomorrow," Evers said.

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The gov added later in the video, "There is no empathy or humanity in George Floyd's death, but there must be empathy and humanity in our response to it."

Evers ticked off the names of African American men who have been killed by Wisconsin police officers in recent years: Dontre Hamilton, Sylville Smith, Ernest Lacy and Tony Robinson.

His call comes after protests in several Wisconsin cities have turned violent,

resulting in destruction of police vehicles and looting of businesses.

Sen. Van Wanggaard, R-Racine and a former police officer, said the bill Evers wants passed was “clearly written by liberal activists who have never served with law enforcement, and apparently never even talked or listened to them.” Wanggaard said Evers knows he’s been working on new ways to investigate and prevent deaths in police custody and hopes to have a proposal in the coming weeks.

“If Governor Evers wants to have a productive conversation about the use of force, and preventing these horrific acts, he knows my number,” Wanggaard said. “After two years, Governor Evers should know that dictating to the Legislature is neither productive nor bipartisan. His tactics only serve to divide at a time we should be coming together.”

The offices of Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment.

AB 1012, which was introduced March 20 after the Assembly had already adjourned the regular session, would require law enforcement agencies to create new use of force policies that include the principles that officers’ primary duty is to preserve life and that the use of deadly force only be used as a last resort.

The other principles:

*officers should use tactics that minimize the likelihood that force will become necessary;

*if officers must use physical force, it is the least amount necessary to safely address a threat;

*officers must take reasonable action to stop or prevent unreasonable uses of force by colleagues.

The legislation, which hasn’t received a hearing in either house, also would prohibit disciplining an officer for reporting a violation of the policy regarding the use of force.

Sen. LaTonya Johnson, who co-sponsored the bill with Rep. Chris Taylor, D-Madison,

praised Evers' call on Twitter.

“We have so much work to do, but passing AB 1012 would be great place to start!”
the Milwaukee Dem tweeted.

See the Evers release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2020/gov-evers-we-must-confront-societys-comfort--with-racism/>

See more on AB 1012:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/proposals/reg/asm/bill/ab1012>