

Gov. Evers, Lt. Gov. Barnes: Announce policing accountability and transparency reforms in Wisconsin

Posted on Friday, Jun 19, 2020

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Evers, Barnes call for bipartisanship in first step toward dismantling racism in a state consistently ranked among the worst in racial disparities

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes today announced a package of legislation to increase accountability and transparency in policing in Wisconsin. The announcement comes on Juneteenth, celebrated annually to commemorate the end of slavery in the United States, and in the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and calls of Wisconsinites and people across the country for justice and equity for Black Americans.

“Our country promises the opportunity of justice and equity, and it’s time for us to deliver on that promise,” said Gov. Evers. “We know we don’t have all of the answers—no one does. This legislation is a first step toward dismantling the systems we’ve created, but it can only be a first step. Racism and racial disparities can’t be solved with any single bill or package of bills, or person—it’s on all of us, together. We must meet this movement with our empathy and our compassion, but most of all we must meet it with action.”

Wisconsin is consistently ranked one of the worst states in the country for racial disparities, from infant mortality to child poverty, educational attainment to employment, and homeownership to incarceration. The COVID-19 pandemic has likewise illustrated disparities in health outcomes as Black Wisconsinites only comprise of 6.7% of the state’s population according to the U.S. Census Bureau but account for [nearly a quarter of Wisconsin’s COVID-19 deaths](#).

“We continue to lose far too many Black lives, be it from inequities in criminal justice and policing, in health care, or in economic well-being,” said Lt. Gov. Barnes. “The social and economic consequences of these deep-seated inequities reach every community in our state and eliminating them will require action at every level of government. Passing these bills is one piece of how we move closer to accountability, equity, and justice for all.”

Gov. Evers and Lt. Gov. Barnes today also called for bipartisanship in addressing racism and increasing law enforcement accountability [in a letter](#) to the Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus.

“[C]alling another special session where legislative leaders come in and gavel in and gavel out risks us losing this incredible moment in history where we can and should be able to work together to get something accomplished,” Gov. Evers and Lt. Gov. Barnes said. “We should not need a special session when people across our state are demanding we take action.”

The package of legislation announced by the governor and lieutenant governor includes:

- [LRB 6273](#):
 - Establishes statewide use of force standards for all law enforcement agencies that includes that the primary duty of law enforcement is to preserve the life of all individuals; that deadly force is to be used only as the last resort; that officers should use skills and tactics that minimize the likelihood that force will become necessary; that, if officers must use physical force, it should be the least amount of force necessary to safely address the threat; and that law enforcement officers must take reasonable action to stop or prevent any unreasonable use of force by their colleagues;
 - Prohibits discipline of a law enforcement officer for reporting a violation of a law enforcement agency’s use of force policy; and
 - Requires the Law Enforcement Standards Board (LESB) to develop a model use of force policy for law enforcement agencies.
- [LRB 6274](#):
 - Requires each law enforcement officer to annually complete at least eight hours of training on use of force options and de-escalation techniques.
- [LRB 6275](#):
 - Creates a \$1,000,000 grant program, administered by the Department of Justice, to fund community organizations that are utilizing evidence-based outreach and violence interruption strategies to mediate conflicts, prevent retaliation and other potentially violent situations, and connect individuals to community supports.
- [LRB 6276](#):
 - Requires law enforcement agencies to develop policies prohibiting the use of chokeholds.
- [LRB 6277](#):
 - Requires each law enforcement agency to not only prepare a policy regarding the use of force by its law enforcement officers, but to make it available publicly online.
- [LRB 6281](#):
 - Creates a civil cause of action for unnecessarily summoning a law enforcement officer with intent to infringe upon a right of the person under the Wisconsin Constitution or the U.S. Constitution; unlawfully discriminate against the person; cause the person to feel harassed, humiliated, or embarrassed; cause the person to be expelled from a place in which the person is lawfully located; damage the person’s reputation or standing within the community; or damage the person’s financial, economic, consumer, or business prospects or interests.
- [LRB 6283](#):
 - Requires that the Department of Justice publish an annual report on use of force incidents, including incidents where there was a shooting, where a firearm was discharged in the direction of a person (even if there was no injury), and where other serious bodily harm resulted from the incident; and
 - Requires certain demographic information to be collected about each incident and reported annually by DOJ on its website.
- [LRB 6289](#):
 - Prohibits no-knock search warrants.
- [LRB 6292](#):
 - Makes certain changes to the responsibilities of the LESB, including requiring LESB to also regulate jail and juvenile detention officer training standards and regulate recruitment standards for the recruiting of new law enforcement, jail, and juvenile detention officers;
 - Requires each law enforcement agency to maintain an employment file for each employee; and
 - Requires each potential candidate for a position in an agency, jail, or facility that is or has been employed by a different agency, jail, or facility to authorize their previous employer to disclose his or her employment files to the hiring entity.