

Kids Forward: Condemning Legislature's failure to address systemic police reform

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Last Thursday we asked you to contact your elected representatives and Speaker of the Assembly Robin Vos. The ask of them was simple: "Do your job to protect Wisconsinites." In this context that meant engaging in the emergency legislative session to discuss a series of bills to address police accountability and transparency. As part of that request we said:

Failure of our elected officials to sincerely participate would be an abdication of their basic responsibility. Earnest participation in the process requires engaged conversation and commitment to substantive next steps to address police reform. Establishing a task force alone, is not enough.

On Monday, Republican legislative leaders decided to ignore your request and did in fact abdicate their most basic responsibility. Both the Senate and the Assembly met for less than 30 seconds each before ending their sessions. Our elected officials choose other activities over addressing public safety in the wake of more police brutality and violence, in this case leaving Jacob Blake, a Black father paralyzed and the subsequent killing of two protesters by a white teenager.

As stated by Milwaukee Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer in response to the legislature's inaction: "At the end of the day, it feels like there's work to be done, and they're not doing it."

We completely agree. So what is the work to be done? The list is long, and we will address most of that in subsequent posts. But in the immediate term, Governor Evers forwarded nine different bills on a range of police accountability issues to the

legislature in June. Some of the reforms in these bills focus on creating standards for the use of force, publishing an annual report on use of force, banning choke holds (which a police officer used to kill George Floyd), and prohibiting no-knock search warrants (which allowed police to enter Breonna Taylor's apartment and kill her).

Senator Wanggaard has also forwarded a series of bills aimed at police accountability. His bills cover some similar issues, including establishing policies for the use of force, publishing an annual report on the use of force, and prohibiting training on choke holds. While Senator Wanggaard's bills do not go as far as the Governor's, there is substantial overlap on the issues of use of force and chokeholds between his bills and the Governor's. While addressing these two issues is in no way sufficient, surely there is enough there to spend more than 30 seconds discussing.

After they met for 17 seconds on Monday, there was some indication that they might come back into session on Thursday. So what happened? Nothing. No discussion. No debate. No votes. No action. Once again, the legislature has disregarded the responsibility of its office in a time of great need.

We need action to transform this system and to give Wisconsin residents the response we deserve from our elected leadership. We need action, not next year, but now!