

Assembly passes series of bills to overhaul police policies, sends four to Evers' desk

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The Assembly today approved a series of bills to overhaul police policies, including one to ban chokeholds except in self-defense or when an officer's life is in danger.

That bill was one of four heading to the desk of Gov. Tony Evers, who has said while he wished the bills went further, they were a first step.

One of the bills in the package hit a snag as the Assembly put off debating a Senate bill that would define use-of-force for police policies and include new requirements that officers must report colleagues who use excessive force.

SB 120 outlines when it is permissible for law enforcement officers to use force and requires them to intervene when a colleague sees another cross the line. It also would set a standard that law enforcement officers must make every effort to preserve and protect human life and the safety of all persons.

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Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, said the chamber was working on an amendment that would address concerns raised by the Milwaukee Police Association over the whistleblower protections, before revisiting it. Steineke said the chamber plans to take up the bill next week.

Evers included in his budget a provision to ban chokeholds. The Legislature's Joint Finance Committee removed the provision, which didn't include exceptions, from the budget early in its deliberations.

Bills approved today that have now cleared both houses include: SB 121, regarding

police use of chokeholds; SB 122, which would require police to publish their use-of-force on their website or their municipality's website; SB 123, which would require DOJ to collect data and publish an annual report on police use of force incidents; and SB 124, which would require DOJ to distribute \$600,000 for community-policing grant programs across the state.

The co-chairs of the Speaker's Task Force on Racial Disparities, Rep. Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, and Rep. Shelia Stubbs, D-Madison, argued the bills are meant to improve police accountability and transparency. They hope the legislation will also improve tense relations between police and the public.

Stubbs, ahead of floor votes on the legislation, said now is the time for action.

"The pie is no longer in the sky," she said. "The food is on the table, and I urge each of my colleagues to do what you do best: dig in and support these bills."

Steineke called his work on the task force some of the most challenging yet rewarding work he's ever done.

"I thank the lady from the 77th for being a shining example of how to get things done in the Legislature," Steineke said, referring to Stubbs. He also thanked the other lawmakers on the task force.

However, Rep. David Bowen, D-Milwaukee, criticized the task force leaders for what he said was a "more than disappointing" missed opportunity.

"So I was wary of this process from the beginning," he said. "I want more from my colleagues. I want more from this body. And I want more, not for my sake or for my own name, but I want more for the future of this state, the future of our kids and the future of our citizens that want a Wisconsin that works better than what we have right now."

Bowen added the constituents he's spoken with are "tired of being sick and sick of being tired" of lawmakers blocking their proposed solutions to the problems lawmakers today say these police policy bills are meant to address.

Freshman Rep. Supreme Moore Omokunde, D-Milwaukee, delivering his first floor speech of his Assembly career, raised concerns about the exception for officers who feel their life is in danger. He said the bill makes Black and brown people still susceptible to racist police officers who feel more threatened by certain people

based on their race.

At least some Republican lawmakers did not applaud Moore Omokunde after his remarks despite the Assembly tradition to applaud every lawmakers' first speech on the floor.

The Assembly also passed by voice vote AB 190, which would require the Law Enforcement Standards Board to regulate jail and juvenile detention officer training standards and to regulate recruitment standards for the recruiting of new law enforcement, jail, and juvenile detention officers.

Before passing the bill, they voted to add an amendment that allows the LESB to decertify officers if they are convicted of any felony or crime related to domestic abuse, if they resign in lieu of termination or if an officer is terminated for just cause.

Other policing bills the Assembly passed today include:

*AB 329, which would require DOJ to collect and report data on no-knock warrant use by police;

*AB 330, which would require school resource officers to undergo specialized training aside from their regular police training before working as an SRO;

*AB 331, which would require officers submit to psychological examination prior to employment;

*AB 332, which would require officers complete at least four hours of crisis management training on a biennial basis;

*AB 333, which would increase grants for communities to establish and enhance law enforcement and behavioral health services emergency response collaboration programs;

*AB 334, would require officers involved in an incident that creates great bodily harm to a person or when an officer discharges their weapon to undergo drug testing following the incident; and

*AB 335, which would require the DOJ to award grants to police departments to purchase body cameras for patrolling duties.

Those bills have yet to receive Senate approval.