

Rep. Bowen: Statement on Speakers' Task Force on Racial Disparities Policing Bills

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MILWAUKEE – In reflection on the seven policing-related bills from the Speakers' Task Force on Racial Disparities that were discussed and debated during today's Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety public hearing, State Rep. David Bowen (D-Milwaukee) released the following statement:

“Quite frankly, the bills we heard in Committee today were a disappointment. Back at the beginning of the Speakers' Task Force process, when it was revealed that Task Force Co-Chair Rep. Steineke had called the appointment a ‘political loser’ and indicated that the purpose of the task force would be ‘creating guardrails’ around reform, I largely held my tongue in the press. I was willing to give Rep. Steineke and the Task Force the benefit of the doubt. But today, it became abundantly clear that the task force process did *exactly* what Steineke said it would – it ignored the voices of activists and advocates, and instead laid out guardrails around what types of reform would even be considered.

While most of the bills presented today are not offensive on their face and some would work to codify certain good practices that are already happening in many jurisdictions, they very clearly do not go far enough, and do not rise to the moment or advance the kind of justice reforms that have been demanded of us. While some of my colleagues on the Committee wanted us to believe that these bills were somehow a win not only for our own communities, but for the entire country, I

refuse to play into that narrative. I will not pat myself or anyone else on the back for doing the absolute bare minimum.

That said, during Committee today, I expressed my willingness to work with the bill authors to craft amendments that would fix issues with some of the bills, and bring others more in line with what needs to be done in this moment. I sincerely hope that the Committee takes its time with these bills and allows myself and others to work on amendment language that would not only enhance bipartisan consensus around these reforms, but also incorporate the concerns and desires of grassroots community members. Together, through the legislative process, we can make most of these bills actually respond to the needs of our communities.

Unfortunately, two of the bills presented today are quite frankly insults to the activists who have spent so much time marching for justice, and I encourage my colleagues to vote these bills down. Assembly Bill 329, relating to no-knock warrant data collection, and Assembly Bill 330, relating to school resource officers, do not even provide us with the meager reforms the other bills in the package do. These bills don't really do anything; AB 330 simply codifies practices that are already happening around our state, and we do not need statutory language to collect data on no-knock warrants, as AB 329 would suggest. Instead, these bills stand in the way of meaningful reform on the use of no-knock warrants and removing police from schools – two of the clearest calls for reform that have come from advocates for justice but hampered by this skewed process. All of this, even when we know that no-knock warrants can be deadly; a fact brought to light both in the case of Breonna Taylor and in the death of Matthew Rittner, a police officer from Milwaukee who was recently killed while executing an unnecessary no-knock warrant. I am disappointed that these two bills were even included in the package brought before us today, and I sincerely hope that we can go back to the drawing board on these two topics and deliver bills that would *actually* benefit our communities.”