

Senate backs amended bill on police use of force

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The Senate today backed an Assembly change in use-of-force legislation that was requested by the Milwaukee Police Association, eliminating the original bill's provision to hold officers criminally liable for failing to intervene when another officer uses force illegally.

The bill now goes to Gov. Tony Evers. Under the new version of the bill, officers would be required to prevent or stop another officer from using force only if they observe force that does not comply with the use-of-force standard and it is safe for them to intervene. SB120 complies with another request from the MPA: it would not be implemented until January to provide time to update officers' training.

Sen. Lena Taylor, D-Milwaukee, was one of the original co-sponsors of the bill. But she opposed the change and complained, "This says the blue wall of silence can exist."

The bill's author, Sen. Van Wanggaard, said the change removes the words "or reasonably should have observed the use of force" from the bill and called Taylor's comment "an overreaction."

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"This bill still requires officers who observe an illegal use of force to report it, and intervene if safe to do so," the Racine Republican told WisPolitics.com. "The idea the amendment 'guts' the bill is laughable."

Black Leaders Organizing for Communities called a news conference ahead of today's floor period to complain about the change, and the group was joined by Reps. David Bowen, D-Milwaukee, and Francesca Hong, D-Madison.

“The MPA has more control over Speaker Vos than anyone else in the state,” Bowen said. “This process is too controlled by law enforcement.”

Bowen also said the Legislature missed an opportunity to fund violence prevention and put money into communities through the biennial budget. Bowen added that the Legislature cannot wait for another Jacob Blake to take action and pushed his colleagues to pass the Enough is Enough package, which aims to reshape law enforcement training and enhance transparency in policing.

Hong offered her support for BLOC’s request that Evers create an executive commission highlighting community voices without any law enforcement officers or elected officials, noting that activists “shouldn’t have to fight for crumbs all the time.”

Hong said while Republicans “are public enemy number one when it comes to Black lives,” Evers needs to take more action on policing.

“He and his team need to be a little bit more uncomfortable,” Hong said. “I know that the governor can do more and I think sometimes he chooses not to.”

Nate Hamilton, whose brother Dontre was shot and killed by then-Milwaukee police officer Christopher Manney in 2014, called for legislation ensuring independent investigations into police violence. To Hamilton, a seat at the table is essential.

“We still feel like three-fifths of a person,” Hamilton said. “When we sit at this table, we will no longer be muted.”