

Taylor, Wanggaard confident police reform bills will pass Legislature

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Ahead of today's Senate vote, a bipartisan pair of senators said they're confident a series of police reform bills will pass both legislative chambers and get signed into law by Gov. Tony Evers.

In a Milwaukee Press Club-WisPolitics.com virtual event yesterday, Sens. Lena Taylor, D-Milwaukee, and Van Wanggaard, R-Racine, both touted the bills as a step in the right direction on promoting transparency and accountability in policing.

"What you see is our effort to try and bring all of the different opinions together," Taylor said of the bipartisan bills. "It's not perfect, but I believe it's better than where we are."

Senators vote today on four bills that would, among other things, promote community-oriented policing and require the state Department of Justice to collect data on use-of-force incidents and produce an annual report.

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Wanggaard, a former career police officer, said Wisconsin was already "pretty much the gold standard" in the country when it comes to police transparency and accountability. But he added the bills will "potentially make it a little better."

Police reform has become a national discussion after a wave of protests and civil unrest last year calling for action after incidents like the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha.

Evers after Blake's shooting called a special session of the Legislature to take up reform bills. And Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, established a Task Force on Racial Disparities to look into changes in statute.

Wanggaard and Taylor yesterday said they've worked together on these bills — and others expected later this year — since long before Floyd's death and the task force. Taylor noted that Milwaukee and the state years ago already had their share of stories of African Americans deaths linked to police, including Dontre Hamilton and Derek Williams.

Both said the discussion on police reform won't end with today's bills, and that they look forward to working with Evers and Vos on other legislation. They also have more bills of their own that could receive a floor vote sometime this summer.

Taylor added that she felt confident the bills will pass the Assembly this session and make it to the governor's desk.

"I believe the governor will sign most of them, if not all of them," she said.

Spokespeople for Evers and Vos didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

When asked which bill of the series they felt would be the most impactful, both noted one that would require certain training for fire and police commissioners in Milwaukee and ensure a member of the local police union would have a seat on the commission.

Taylor said the bill was the most important to her in part because of how it would impact her local city and district. And Wanggaard called it one of the most important because he felt it would help residents in the state's largest city regain trust in their police force.

Wanggaard, who previously sat on Racine's commission, said the idea behind the bills was to ensure that people on the commission are informed and have a background in the careers they oversee. He dismissed any concerns that having a member of the police union as a voting commissioner could divide the board on ideological lines.

"I was one person on a board of five," he said of his time as a commissioner. "My attitude and everything I did was under a microscope, as it should be. It should be open."

See the Senate agenda [here](#).

