



June 3, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement from Assembly Candidate Nicki Vander Meulen on Future of Police Oversight and Operations

I have been deeply moved by the overwhelming response to George Floyd's murder and the protests against police brutality in our community and around the country. Led by young Black organizers, people of all races and backgrounds are demanding systemic change, an end to police violence, and fundamentally different approaches to public safety and policing. Political leaders need to deliver -- not just with sympathetic words, but with action.

As a candidate for the State Assembly, and after conversations with Black community leaders, organizers, and attorneys, I am offering the following agenda for changes to policing in Wisconsin. As an attorney, I know firsthand that we must radically alter our criminal justice institutions if they are to maintain legitimacy. I invite a conversation about these proposals, and other elements of an agenda that will ensure that those whom we entrust to protect and serve truly serve all of us.

I am calling on state leaders to take the following actions:

- Establish an independent state agency responsible for investigating all instances of police abuse and misconduct, and for continuous monitoring and reporting of state and local law enforcement agencies' culture, practices, training, and abuses. Empower this agency to discipline police departments and to work with the Attorney General and local District Attorneys to prosecute cases of police misconduct. This agency should also be tasked with making recommendations to the Governor and local officials concerning the disarmament of law enforcement officers under their command.
- Revoke state grant funding for local law enforcement agencies that acquire or utilize military-style policing equipment and remove such equipment from our state law enforcement supply stocks.
- Establish criminal statutes specific to police abuses and behavior. As a criminal defense attorney, I have seen cases where the circumstances of a police officer's job make it difficult to prove their guilt under civilian criminal statutes. Laws defining police abuse, police assault, police negligence, and police murder can increase accountability.
- Prohibit state and local law enforcement agencies from hiring officers with a history of misconduct or abuse at other agencies.

- Fund and require state and local law enforcement officers to collect data on every traffic stop and encounter with civilians, including data on the civilian's race and a description of the purpose and result of the stop. In North Carolina, the act of collecting data alone significantly reduced racial disparities in traffic stops, searches, and arrests, and increased community trust in law enforcement. Establish criminal penalties for falsification of this data.
- Fund and require the use of body cameras for all state and local law enforcement officers, along with provisions for the storing of and access to footage and data. Establish criminal penalties for officers turning off their camera or covering their badge number while on duty.
- Provide state funding for counties and municipalities to establish citizen review boards and other mechanisms for civilian control of law enforcement agencies.
- Provide state funding for localities to shift emergency response duties for mental health, homeless, and other 911 calls from the police to a social worker or other nonviolent professional.
- Increase state funding for local government operations so that counties and municipalities no longer rely on traffic tickets and court fees to support their work.
- Incentivize state and local law enforcement agencies to hire officers with an educational background in fields such as psychology, sociology, ethnic studies, urban studies, and social work. Fund current officers' education in these fields.

Policing reform must come as part of a broader transformative agenda. We must overhaul our criminal justice system, support public defenders, end cash bail, and ensure legal representation in civil cases. We must use a racial equity lens to make public policy in every state department and on every issue—from education, to healthcare, to the environment. For too long, profound racial inequities in Wisconsin have brought shame upon our state. As we work to build a society founded on justice, peace, and solidarity, I expect to see our state, local, and federal governments lead the way with transformative changes to policing.

Nicki Vander Meulen