Wisconsin State Senators Release Bipartisan Police Reform Proposals

Senate Judiciary & Public Safety Committee Chairman Van Wanggaard (R-Racine), ranking Democratic committee member Senator Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee) and Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) on Wednesday announced they have come to a bipartisan agreement on police reform legislation and have come together to draft a package of bills that they say will maintain effective law enforcement service while improving the accountability and transparency of police and increasing community involvement. The package was developed through conversations last summer between the state Senators, law enforcement officers and reform advocates.

The bills, known collectively as the Public Safety PACT, include:

- Reforms to the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission and Madison Police and Fire Commission (LRB-0158)
- Creation of an advisory board to analyze use-of- force incidents and recommend ways to prevent them (LRB-0074)
- Whistleblower protections and mandatory use of force reporting for police (LRB-0075)
- A Community-Oriented Policing (COP) grant program (LRB-0184)
- Publication of use-of-force policies (LRB-0076)
- Annual reporting of use-of-force incidents (LRB-0160)
- Prohibiting training the use of chokeholds (LRB-0183)

In addition, the following bill has been drafted by Senators Wanggaard and Darling and listed as part of this package of bills, but Senator Taylor is not listed as an author:

- Decreasing shared revenue payments to municipalities based on decreased funding for law enforcement officers (LRB-0157)

State Senators Wanggaard, Darling and Taylor are three of the seven members who serve on the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety.

The eight bills were put out for co-sponsorship Wednesday and will be formally introduced in the state Senate in February.

It should be noted that a separate entity - the Speaker's Task Force on Racial Disparities - has also been meeting over the past few months and is expected to come up with its own set of bills/legislation later this year. Read the latest on that effort below.

Racial Disparities Task Force Subcommittee Examines Use of Force by Law Enforcement

The Speaker’s Task Force on Racial Disparities Subcommittee on Law Enforcement Policies and Standards met Thursday and discussed police use-of-force training in Wisconsin, the reporting of police use-of-force incidents, crisis intervention training and the use of body cameras.

The task force subcommittee heard a presentation from Kalvin Barrett, Madison College law enforcement instructor, about the academy training program and what is taught regarding use of force. He said there are five key rules regarding the use of force:

- To gain control in pursuit of a legitimate law enforcement purpose.
- The officer may use a level and degree of force necessary to regain control.
- If a level of force being used is not effective, the officer may either disengage or escalate to a higher level of force, and should be constantly evaluating the threat posed.
- Once control is gained, the officer must reduce the level of force needed to maintain that control.
- The officer must always be a position of advance, for example, be positioned behind a suspect, not in front.

He said there are also five levels of force: presence, dialogue, control alternatives, protective alternatives and deadly force.

At Thursday's meeting, the task force discussed:

- Whether it would be beneficial to require officers to report the use of force by a fellow officer.
- Whether crisis intervention training should be mandatory statewide for law enforcement officers – either for new recruits going through the academy and/or for current officers as part of ongoing training - and how it would be paid for.
- Whether body cameras should be mandatory for law enforcement officers statewide and when they should be required to be activated.
- Whether Wisconsin should have statutory language banning the use of chokeholds by police. However, it was noted that a chokehold is a not a trained technique in Wisconsin.
- Whether or in what instances officers should be required to report when they unholster a gun. Also, whether and how that data, if collected and reported to the state, would be used in a meaningful way.

More discussions or draft language might be brought forward at a future task force meeting on these above topics. The next meeting of this task force subcommittee will be in February in Kenosha, although the specific date has not yet been set.