

Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 258

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and members for today's hearing on Assembly Bill 258.

Police cannot be an occupying force in an area. That creates and adds to an adversarial relationship between the police and the community members. Good policing means that the police and public safety is woven into the fabric of a community.

To help build the relationship, Assembly Bill 258 creates a grant program for Community-Oriented Policing, or COP, Houses. This is a subject that Senator Taylor and I have been working on for many years.

We've seen the success of COP Houses around the country. COP house programs focus on buying vacant homes in high crime areas and rehabbing the house to become a local point of contact with law enforcement. There, officers perform daily duties, while building relationships as a member of the neighborhood.

And the fact is community policing works. As seen in Racine, non-emergency calls to police decrease and property maintenance increases. Crime rates plummet, including by up to 70% in some neighborhoods. In one neighborhood, aggravated assaulted dropped by 94% in just four years.

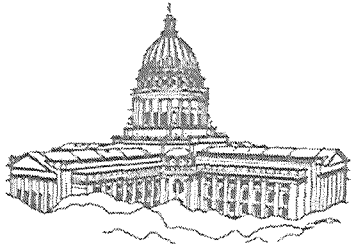
Over time, the COP house becomes a part of the community where people feel safe, build relationships with people in the house, and each other. The COP House becomes a public space for community issues, and brings the police to a central place in neighborhood discussions. Citizens can get the knowledge and resources to take their neighborhood back, leading to the long-term stabilization of neighborhoods.

There is a substitute amendment authored by Representatives Steineke and Stubbs before this committee. I authored an identical one to the Senate companion bill last week. The amendment does three things. The amendment it lowers the population threshold from 60,000 to 30,000 people to allow more communities to qualify and creates scoring criteria for the awarding of grants. Finally, the amendment removes the funding, but we intend to put \$600,000 in the budget in the first year and \$500,000 in the second year into this program.

COP Houses bridge the gap between policing and the neighborhood. I have seen firsthand how they can take back neighborhoods from thugs. It creates a partnership between police and the community it serves. This bill is an important part, not just of building relationships between the police and the community, but also in combatting crime. It deserves your support.

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LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

HERE TO SERVE YOU!

**Testimony of State Senator Lena C. Taylor
Assembly Committee on Local Government
AB 258/SB 124
May 18, 2021**

Good morning, Chairman Novak, Vice-Chair Gundrum and members of the Assembly Committee on Local Government. Thank you for this public hearing and opportunity to provide testimony regarding Assembly Bill 258, relating to community-oriented policing-house grant program and making an appropriation.

Today, this committee and the Assembly Committee on Government Accountability are holding public hearings on the merits of a number of policing reform bills. In light of the high profile cases involving law enforcement over the past few year, many might assume that the bills coming before the committee are reactionary in nature.

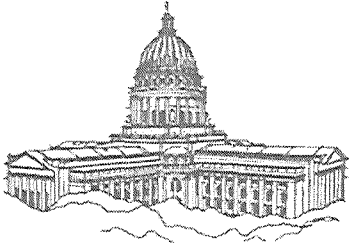
In reality, much of my 17 years in the legislature has been dedicated to creating policing policy that improves community and police relationships, accountability, safety for all involved, and transparency.

I started working on a Community-oriented policing-house (COP House) grant for the Milwaukee community in 2015. After learning about this successful model, which seeks proactive alternatives to aiding crime reduction in well-known hot spots in communities.

The purpose of COP Houses is long-term stabilization by way of building relationships with the community, improving the quality of life, reducing crime, consolidating resources, and providing programming. Data supports that COP Houses have reduced crime by as much as 70 percent in impacted communities.

The City of Racine has employed the use of COP Houses since 1993. During an appearance on WPR's "The Morning Show," Racine Police Department Sgt. Joseph Spaulding said it was a reaction to an increase in drug, gang and violent crimes. Spaulding said embedding officers in homes located in communities experiencing high rates of crime has worked.

"We're seeing a dramatic decrease in crime and especially violent crime," said Spaulding. "And we're seeing an increase in the police department working with the community and the neighbors and building trust in one another." Spaulding said probation and parole officers with the Wisconsin Department of Justice have also been stationed at COP houses. Racine has had COP Houses for 30 years!



LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

HERE TO SERVE YOU!

This bill is an attempt to bring the same resources to communities around the state of Wisconsin. In the past year, Milwaukee has seen a spike in crime that demands a response. COP Houses are not a cure-all, but they are a proven commodity that works.

I am aware that opposition has been raised by the ACLU to this proposal. As a long-time supporter of the work of the ACLU, I am going to have to respectfully disagree with them. Quite frankly, this is not a measure that funds the police. This is an example of a strategy or another tool that has had positive outcomes in making communities safer. If ran has intended, COP Houses bring resources to areas in need. It does not lead to an oversaturation of police in neighborhoods, but helps to break down barriers and establish relationships between the community and law enforcement. This bill is win-win for all involved.

Therefore, I am hopeful that AB 258 will receive the support of members of the committee. Thank you.



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Shelia Stubbs

77TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Tuesday, May 18th 2021

Assembly Committee on Local Government

Good morning Chairman Novak and Members of the Committee,

The Speaker's Taskforce on Racial Disparities spent seven months coming to consensus on creating real reforms in our policing system. This taskforce was co-chaired by myself and Representative Steineke, and was comprised of community leaders, leaders of faith, and experts in law enforcement. In this time we created 18 recommendations that are now being realized through policy. The legislation in front of the committee today will invest in healing the divide between law enforcement and community.

Assembly Bill 258 establishes a grant program for the Department of Justice to fund municipalities that create Community Oriented Policing (COP) house programs. COP Houses is a residential home that is staffed by members of law enforcement and other critical service providers. These houses work to embed officers within a community, and strengthen the connection between law enforcement and their community. COP House programs are a proven and effective step towards promoting trust and preventing crime within a community. In the Taskforce's discussions around violence prevention, COP houses were shown to be most effective if they included community involvement from faith based organizations, non-profit organizations or other government agencies.

The ultimate goal of these houses is to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between law enforcement and the community they serve. Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 will ensure that every COP house program is considered based on how it benefits the connection between community and law enforcement. This amendment also makes clear that the Department of Justice must consider how a COP House will impact a community before it is implemented.

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WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Shelia Stubbs

77TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

In addition, Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 lowers the population size requirement for municipalities that apply for this grant. This recommendation from the Taskforce was made so that communities that would benefit from this program are not arbitrarily precluded from applying.

I want to thank Representative Spiros and Senator Waangard for their willingness to work with the Taskforce's recommendation, and be open to Assembly Substitute Amendment 1. The hard work of the Taskforce is far from over, but these recommendations are now being made reality through legislative action. Our discussions with leaders of faith, community leaders, and law enforcement experts informed recommendations that will help address the racial disparities in our policing system. I am proud to see that this avenue of real action is open, and that real reforms can continue to be made in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelia Stubbs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Representative Shelia Stubbs



JOHN SPIROS

State Representative • 86th Assembly District

Assembly Bill 258

May 18, 2021

Testimony from Rep. Spiros

Hello, and thank you Chairman Novak and members of the Assembly Committee on Local Government for allowing me to submit testimony on Assembly Bill 258 related to a community-oriented policing (COP) house grant program.

This bill is part of the Public Safety PACT (Accountability, Community Involvement and Transparency) legislative package and a recommendation from the Speaker's Task Force on Racial Disparities. The goal of this bill is to increase the community involvement with the police and build relationships between the two by integrating COP houses into the fabric of the neighborhood.

AB 258 creates a grant program to fund COP houses in communities and the substitute amendment makes cities with a population of 30,000 or more eligible for the grants. The substitute amendment also lays out the criteria for how the grants must be awarded.

The COP house program is structured so that vacant homes in high crime areas are purchased, renovated, and staffed by police officers. The house is open to the public during certain hours so that community members can interact with the officers in the community. The officers who staff the house look to build relationships with the residents and learn the needs of the neighborhood to increase safety and reduce crime. The city of Racine has seen great success by implementing COP houses in high crime neighborhoods, and it is the hope that by implementing a state grant program, we can help other areas of the state see these reduced crime rates as well.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to share testimony in support of this bill.



JIM STEINEKE

MAJORITY LEADER

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Testimony on Assembly Bill 258
Assembly Committee on Local Government
Tuesday, May 18, 2021

Chairman Novak and members,

I'd like to thank you for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 258, creating a Community-Oriented Policing (COP) house grant program. This bill is one of many introduced seeking to improve relationships between communities and law enforcement officers in Wisconsin.

Recently, the report of the Speaker's Task Force on Law Enforcement Policies and Standards was released summarizing the activities and topics of consensus identified through multiple meetings and discussions. As Co-chair of the committee, I am incredibly proud of the bipartisan work we've done to have the hard conversations that will make a difference in the lives of people of color in Wisconsin. As we all know, these issues can be incredibly polarizing, yet we have succeeded in bringing the community and law enforcement voices to the table to find consensus and move forward together.

I am encouraged that Assembly Bill 258, creating community-oriented policing (COP) house grant program, continues to gain momentum in the Legislature. A COP house is a physical home located in a residential area which is staffed by police officers and other service providers. Officers who staff the COP house work with intention to build relationships with residents and prioritize the needs of the neighborhood. The COP house approach is a community oriented policing strategy in which the relationships between officer and the residents are essential for crime reduction, improved outcomes for neighborhoods, increased perception of safety, and job satisfaction for police officers.

The task force discussed this legislation at length and generally supports the program. To ensure that COP houses fulfill their vital, community-oriented role, the task force recommends adoption of Substitute Amendment 1 which requires that recipients submit a plan to include community organizations in their operations. These organizations may be non-profits, government organizations, or faith-based organizations. Substitute Amendment 1 also lowers the population threshold so moderate sized cities can also benefit.

I am incredibly grateful to Representative Spiros and Senator Wanggaard who were willing to incorporate our recommendations and make adjustments based on the consensus we found through our discussions with community leaders and law enforcement experts. I also want to thank my task force Co-chair, Representative Stubbs, for her work developing these recommendations. While there is more work to be done, these bills are a great step forward in addressing racial disparities in Wisconsin.



State Rep. David Bowen Testimony in Opposition to AB 111 and AB 258

Chairman Novak and Members of the Assembly Committee on Local Government,

I submit this testimony today in opposition to Assembly Bill 111, relating to decreasing shared revenue payments to municipalities based on decreased funding for law enforcement officers and Assembly Bill 258, relating to expanding the community-oriented policing-house grant program. Simply put, these bills go against the desires and needs of our local communities, they go against the spirit of reform & evidence based prevention that is sweeping our nation, and they undercut the necessity of working together to reimagine public safety in a collaborative and community-centric way.

While both of these bills would take us backwards in the struggle for substantive reform, Assembly Bill 111 is particularly troubling to me, and to many of the tens of thousands of Wisconsinites who have raised their voices in the movement for a transformative approach to public safety. As written, this bill would punish municipalities for choosing to divert resources away from law enforcement by decreasing shared revenue payments from the State. Not only is this an obvious overreach and an infringement on local control of local budgetary decisions, it also sends the message that law enforcement funding is the only funding worth preserving or enhancing, no matter the circumstances. In 2020 alone, Milwaukee spent 46% of its budget on policing, a clearly unsustainable rate given the numerous other services provided by the City and a limited pool of financial resources available to fund all of those services.

In a time where law enforcement budgets already continue to balloon relative to other funding priorities and where communities, experts, and local governments are choosing to consider holistic approaches to public safety that include proven alternatives to traditional policing, this bill is frankly an insult. While the bill authors may have intended AB 111 as an alternative to the concept of “defunding the police,” instead of taking a collaborative or conversational approach to those considerations, this bill stands as a reactionary and inflammatory piece of legislation that will do nothing but create deeper divides between law enforcement and the communities they are entrusted to serve and protect.

Although Assembly Bill 258 is not nearly as egregious of a bill as AB 111, I believe that this bill also puts forth an unhelpful approach to public safety in our communities. In my conversations with community members, I have not heard anyone calling for the expansion of these community-oriented policing (or “COP”) houses. Instead, I have heard community members call



for increased funding for proven crime- and violence-prevention measures, for the establishment of actual community centers with substantive youth and community programming and opportunities, or for funding that would revitalize neighborhoods and ensure that "houses" go to families that actually need them to be homes. Additionally, the possible expansion of these "COP" houses runs the risk of entrenching community concerns regarding over-policing and deepening community mistrust of police intentions, especially when these police officers often live outside and have very few (if any) ties to these communities in the first place. While I understand that proponents of this bill believe that it would enhance public safety and police-community relations, not only do I respectfully disagree, but furthermore I am concerned that this bill may have the opposite effects especially when this approach does not follow evidence-based practices. Instead, I would encourage these proponents to have serious conversations about ensuring that police, just like most public servants, actually live in and understand the communities that they serve, and work with these communities to identify funding priorities and collaborative approaches that will truly enhance public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on these bills. If anyone has any questions, I would be more than happy to answer them.