In Midwest's capitols, legislative push intensifies for state-level changes in police training, standards and prosecutions

By: Tim Anderson [1]

Amid widespread protests and calls for change in response to the May 25 killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, the push for state-level legislative reforms has intensified. Here is a look at some of the bills and policy proposals in three Midwestern states: Minnesota, Michigan and Iowa.

**Minnesota**

Months before Floyd’s death, an 18-member task force [2] (including two members of the Legislature) released 28 recommendations aimed at reducing deadly-force encounters with law enforcement. Among the ideas: 1) Adopt use-of-force standards that make sanctity of life a core organizational value and that include requirements for de-escalation; 2) Improve training and develop new models of response to de-escalate incidents involving individuals in a mental health crisis; and 3) Create a specialized, independent unit within state government to investigate all officer-involved shootings and uses of force that result in death or severe bodily injury.

**Michigan**

One of the first steps taken by Michigan legislators was to advance a bill requiring all incoming officers to complete training on implicit bias, de-escalation techniques and the use of procedural justice in interactions with the public. **SB 945** [3] describes procedural justice as prioritizing “legitimacy over deterrence in obtaining citizen compliance” and emphasizing “a fair process and respectful two-way communication.” As part of their training, too, incoming officers would receive information on the type of mental health resources and services available to them. Lastly, SB 945 mandates that all officers complete 12 hours of continuing education every year.

**Iowa**

Under a new law in Iowa (**HF 2647** [4], signed in June), the state attorney general now has the power to prosecute cases involving the death of a civilian by a police officer, “regardless of whether the county attorney requests the assistance.” In addition, the use of chokeholds by law enforcement is not allowed, except in cases when an officer “reasonably believes” that an individual will use deadly force and cannot be apprehended in any other way. (This is the same standard under Iowa law for use of deadly force by police.)

Other state-level ideas for reform include the mandatory use of police body cameras, public reporting and data collection of deadly-force incidents and citizen complaints against police, and adoption of a confidential whistleblower process for police.

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