



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative Daniel Knodl
Members, Assembly Committee on Government Accountability and Oversight

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference

DATE: May 18, 2021

RE: Support for Policing Reform (Assembly Bills 108, 109, 110, and 134)

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in support of Assembly Bills 108, 109, 110, and 134.

The WCC strongly supports reporting use of force incidents, protecting those who report them, and making use of force policies and data accessible to the public (Assembly Bills 108, 109, and 110). While we would prefer a total ban on choke holds (which, as noted below, is the position of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or USCCB), we believe that Assembly Bill 134 is an important step forward.

Catholic teaching holds that the purpose of law and police is to promote justice. But justice can only be attained when police and other members of the law exercise self-control, mercy, and true respect for all the persons they encounter—persons made in the image and likeness of God and possessing the same inalienable rights as themselves.¹

Last year, following the unjust killing of George Floyd, the U.S. bishops wrote to the Members of the U.S. Congress that people of color are “often treated more harshly than other citizens in their encounters with the criminal justice system” such that “the racism and discrimination that continue to haunt our nation are reflected in similar ways in the criminal justice system.”²

The letter went on to support several policing reforms, including “collection of data on use-of-force, training towards de-escalation, work to end racial profiling, doing away with chokeholds, using body cameras, greater accountability and means of redress regarding those who exercise public authority, and a commission to study the issue further and make additional recommendations.”³

¹ USCCB letter to Members of Congress on Police Reform (June 24, 2020) <https://www.usccb.org/resources/2020-06-24-Letter-to-Senate-on-Police-Reform.pdf> and <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-house-police-reform-june-24-2020>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

In Wisconsin, the WCC's own *2021 Public Policy Positions* call for addressing the root causes of racial bias and promoting racial justice and reconciliation, while continuing to support those who preserve public safety. They stress that "Law enforcement personnel have a responsibility to be peacemakers and they deserve the public's respect and support in carrying out duties that are often dangerous and unpleasant." At the same time, they urge that policing be transparent and accountable.⁴

These four bills, while not perfect, will make policing in Wisconsin more just, transparent, and accountable. They will encourage further reforms and help restore community trust. They demonstrate what can be accomplished through careful deliberation, stakeholder involvement, and bipartisan cooperation. We thank the authors and sponsors for introducing them and we respectfully urge this committee to pass them.

Thank you.

⁴ WCC 2021 Public Policy Positions (January 2021) <https://www.wisconsinatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-WCC-Public-Policy-Positions-FINAL.pdf>