

Police Reform: Too Rushed or Too Delayed?



Easton Delegations Tackles the Question

Timing was the crucial question for Easton's two state legislators, as they voted on police reform in the special session of the Connecticut General Assembly that convened last July 24 and adjourned July 29.

The state House and Senate adopted the proposed law enforcement measure and Gov. Ned Lamont signed the bill, officially known as H.B. No. 6004, into law on Friday.

The legislation, among its reforms, provides for an inspector general and municipal civilian review boards to oversee police behavior.

The reform would also make it easier for municipalities to fire and decertify police officers. Disciplinary action by municipalities against police officers would become matters of public record.

On the contested issue of qualified immunity, the legislation would enable individuals to bring civil suits against police officers for alleged denial of rights, subject to a court's determination that the police officer in good faith believed that he or she was acting

lawfully.

In a party-line vote Wednesday, state Sen. Tony Hwang, R-28th, was essentially asking for more time to design law-enforcement reform, when he joined his fellow Republicans in voting against the police accountability and transparency police measure.

After a 10-and-a-half hour debate, state Rep. Anne Hughes, D-135th, urged her House colleagues to support the police reform bill as an emergency response, without delay, to the decades-long trauma of systemic racism and rogue police behavior.

“I agree there is a need to act and many of the elements in the bill are good, strong proposals. But rushing legislation does not do justice to the level of attention this issue requires. The hastily pushed approval may create sweeping unintended consequences,” Hwang stated in a press release.

Hughes told her colleagues, “You better believe this registration is rushed because that’s what you do in an emergency. You rush to render aid, to intervene. And our colleagues have worked hard for years to prepare for this intervention. I resent the implication that this is sloppy. What’s sloppy is waiting so long to intervene.”

The differences, then, between Easton’s legislators in the matter of law enforcement reform appear to come down to issues of process, not necessarily of policy, although the qualified immunity debate did reveal significant policy differences on the floors of both the House and the Senate.

Section 42 of the police accountability and transparency act does offer the contending parties some potential relief on the immunity issue by providing for a task force to study the implementations of the police transparency and accountability act and to report to the General Assembly no later than Jan. 1, 2021 on “any recommendations related” to the immunity provisions of the reform bill.

This includes the “anticipated impact” that the measure might have “on the ability of a police officer or municipality to obtain liability insurance.”

Contributor’s Note: This article continues a review of recently adopted law enforcement legislation. A third article will cover three other bills adopted by the state legislature dealing with absentee ballots, telehealthcare, and insulin costs.