



States Weigh Using Review Boards for Police-Involved Shootings

By John Blosser

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Driven by protests and demands from civil rights groups after the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York, several states are considering legislation to establish independent civilian or police review boards to look into cases of officer-involved shootings.

Wisconsin has had such a law since early last year, which requires outside police agencies to investigate any officer-involved shooting, so that no agency will be investigating its own officers, WMTV Madison reports.

Similar legislation is under consideration in New Jersey, California, New York, Colorado, and Missouri, the Washington Times reports, in a process which ultimately could change the way police shootings are investigated throughout the country.

Colorado Rep. Joe Salazar will introduce legislation that would create a special prosecutor's office to investigate claims of police brutality.

"What we're looking at is for the special prosecution office to investigate cases of excessive force where there is substantial bodily harm or death," Salazar told the Times.

"Colorado's had its problems. This isn't just an issue that's taking place in other parts of the country.

"We want to make it very clear that this isn't targeting police, this is targeting a practice," he said.

In Arizona, Democratic Rep. Reginald Bolding has sponsored a bill which would require the use of body cameras by more than 12,000 peace officers in the state, AZCentral reports.

He has authored another bill, HB2512, which states, "If a law enforcement officer uses deadly physical force in the performance of the officer's official duties and that use causes the death of another person, an investigator or law enforcement officer who is not from the same law enforcement agency as the officer, or the county attorney from another county, shall conduct the investigation into the officer's use of deadly physical force," and refer the results of their investigation to the county attorney where the incident occurred.

Tim Lynch, director of the Cato Institute's Project on Criminal Justice, told the Times, "It's a good idea to have an independent, impartial investigation of allegations of illegal police activity."

However, not all prosecutors or police are enamored with the idea. Josh Marquis, Oregon prosecutor, told the Times, "Many prosecutors, certainly myself included, are seeing in state legislatures what I consider knee-jerk reactions to Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

"The idea that some appointed person who has no relationship with the community would be more likely to rigorously review a police shooting I don't think is true."

Bill Johnson, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations, told the Times, "I think any trust that's been lost has been lost among groups or segments of an electorate that wasn't really inclined to trust the police in the first place."