

Mass. House accepting written testimony on Senate policing bill

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State House News Service

Democratic leaders in the House said Wednesday they would accept written testimony by email through Friday morning on the Senate's version of a broad policing reform bill that passed that chamber on Tuesday after an all-night debate and would put Massachusetts among the majority of states in the country that license police.

Even before that final vote in the Senate, Speaker Robert DeLeo said he hoped to hold a "virtual hearing" this week to allow the public and stakeholders to "provide feedback remotely" on the Senate bill as the House works to craft its own legislation.

The lack of a public hearing on the Senate's bill (S 2800) was a major point of contention for police unions and other critics who felt excluded from the development of the bill, and led to several days of delays.

House Ways and Means Chairman Aaron Michlewitz and Judiciary Committee Co-chair Rep. Claire Cronin announced Wednesday that they would be taking testimony by email only through 11 a.m. on Friday. Anyone wishing to provide feedback can email Testimony.HWMJudiciary@mahouse.gov.

After Friday, the Legislature will have two weeks to finalize a policing reform bill that Gov. Charlie Baker can sign before the end of formal sessions on July 31.

The Senate bill would create a new Police Officer Standards and Accreditation Committee that would license all law enforcement officers every three years and have the authority to revoke an officer's certification for misconduct.

The bill would also ban chokeholds, limit the use of tear gas and establish a duty for a cop to intervene if they witness police misconduct.

The issue of qualified immunity for police and whether the Legislature should make it easier to sue public officials in civil court generated a lot of heated debate in the Senate.

"With the debate in the Senate behind us, it is time to shift our focus to the House," wrote Scott Hovsepien, the president of the Massachusetts Coalition of Police.

Hovsepien's Tuesday statement described himself as "frustrated, confused and angry" by the Senate's middle-of-the-night vote.

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