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Republicans Turn a Blind Eye to Justice Reform

Kenosha – State Senator Bob Wirch (D-Somers) and State Representatives Tod Ohnstad (D-Kenosha) and Tip McGuire (D-Kenosha) spoke out today after Republican leadership gaveled in the Governor’s Special Session on Police Reform and immediately recessed:

“In a time of crisis, with the Kenosha community just beginning the long process of recovery and healing, this is more than just a failure of leadership by Sen. Fitzgerald and Speaker Vos. These are reasonable, common-sense reforms, and their refusal to even let us debate the issues is indefensible,” Wirch said. “We also need the Legislature to come back and discuss aid funding so that Kenosha can begin to rebuild.”

Following the officer-involved shooting of Jacob Blake, Governor Tony Evers renewed his push for a package of police reform legislation, this time calling a special session. Among the reforms included in the package are: a requirement that law enforcement agencies develop policies to ban the use of choke holds; new statewide use of force standards making deadly force a last resort; a required eight hours of training per officer per year on use of force and de-escalation techniques; and a prohibition on no-knock search warrants.

“With a bang of the gavel, the current majority again chose not to lead today,” Ohnstad noted. “It is particularly troubling that the legislative majority continues to ignore responsibility to instead throw stones and hurl partisan tweets at others who are trying to make change and are taking constructive action on the issues important to our community and state.”

McGuire added, “Our community is hurting and wants action. The Legislature had the opportunity to set aside political gamesmanship to do right by our constituents and address criminal justice reform. Regrettably, the GOP majority ignored the calls for change and continued their inaction.”

This year alone, a number of both red and blue states have worked on police reform legislation. In June, Republican Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds signed into law a bipartisan bill banning the use of chokeholds. That same day, Democratic New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a bill repealing a law shielding police disciplinary records from public scrutiny. In June’s Marquette Law Poll, the last time the question was asked, 81% of respondents felt that law enforcement agencies needed more accountability.

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