

# **Illinois Lawmakers Consider Pros, Cons, Of Police Reform Bill, Chief Wells and Dixon Provide Views**

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter  
January 8 2021 2:08 PM



**ILLINOIS** - Illinois lawmakers announced on Tuesday the upcoming discussion of a legislative plan for sweeping police reform. Sen. Elgie Sims, D-Chicago, introduced a 611-page amendment to House Bill 163 Tuesday in the state Senate, a move that would

allow the bill to move during the General Assembly's upcoming lame-duck session scheduled from Friday to Wednesday.

While the bill has been introduced on short notice, it is the result of over 100 hours of hearings held by the Black Caucus over fall and winter months as part of their legislative agenda "to end systemic racism in Illinois." Criminal justice reform and police accountability made up the first of four pillars in that agenda.

HB 163 would eliminate cash bail as a requirement for pretrial release. The section of HB163 known as the "Quasi-criminal and Misdemeanor Pretrial Release Act" would eliminate cash bail requirements for people charged with criminal offenses and misdemeanors and replace it with a uniform set of pretrial release conditions established by the Illinois Supreme Court.

Reforms are numerous but include eliminating cash bail and sworn affidavits, meaning anonymous complaints against officers can be used against that officer. It also eliminates qualified immunity, meaning officers would no longer have blanket protection from civil lawsuits.

Wood River Police Chief Brad Wells has many years in law enforcement with Wood River and Madison County Sheriff's Office and he said this bill that has surfaced causes him and others in the profession great concern.

"The concerning thing is you have folks involved in writing the bill that have no understanding of what the real world is like in law enforcement," he said. "You have people who sit on the sidelines watching cities be burned down and they are wanting to pull the reigns back on law enforcement. Law enforcement is here to keep the peace and we have no bias or prejudice in what we do. We are just there to keep the peace. Some of the politicians want to run how we do our job and want to take away qualified immunity and not understanding what that means. If that happens, there won't be anyone who will want to work in law enforcement.

"I have e-mailed those legislators in our region who have a voice and that has been positive. They have said they won't support; Rep. Crowe said she will not support."

Wells said Rep. Katie Stuart initially produced an opioid bill that regulated electronic monitoring of prescription medications by doctors and someone took it and got a hold of it and turned in the Police Reform Bill.

Bethalto Police Chief Mike Dixon, another long-term law enforcement officer with Madison County Sheriff's Office and now Bethalto Police, said the following:

"The type of legislation being proposed in HB 163 and others which move to eliminate officers qualified immunities, reduce their protections, increase their liabilities, and reduce their ability to protect themselves from violent offenders are the catalyst for chaos that will mark the end of all proactive and meaningful policing in our communities.

"If HB 163 is passed there will be a mass exodus of current officers on duty and no one will apply for the profession in the future. Those who remain will live in constant fear of losing everything they own the minute they sign on for duty and will avoid taking action in every situation at all cost. This kind of fear in the hearts of our nation's law enforcement officers will result in a lawlessness in our streets unlike anything we have ever seen in this country.

"I pray our representatives and legislators use common sense in researching, creating and passing this and/or any future legislation related to police reforms as it will without a doubt have a dramatic effect upon who we are as a nation."

**These are some highlights of the bill:**

- Eliminates Qualified Immunity for police officers, making them personally liable in civil suits.
- Eliminates Officer's rights to Collectively Bargain, creating a "special class" of public employee rights in Illinois that can only negotiate over wages and benefits!
- No contractual language regarding discipline and discharge procedures for police officers.
- Allows officers to be disciplined based on anonymous and unsubstantiated or unverifiable complaints.
- Mandates that unverified complaints be kept with no time limit, no removal and no limits on.
- Substantially increases both initial and ongoing training requirements but does not provide any funding for increased costs and no assurances that the courses will even be offered.
- Mandates the use of body cameras by all departments for every officer but does not include money to pay for cameras.
- Withholds money from any city that does not comply with the requirements of the legislation.
- Eliminates funding for law enforcement agencies
- Eliminates Cash Bail while enacting multiple benefits for people convicted of committing crimes.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)