



WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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Police Reform in Milwaukee: Examining Policies and Recent Changes Here and in Peer Cities *MPD use-of-force policies track national trend; Opportunities center on police role in community*

Milwaukee city officials have pursued significant policing reforms amid the national debate during the past year, but further opportunities may include expanding violence prevention initiatives and crisis response, and bolstering whistleblower protections, critical incident reviews, and community reporting, according to a new Wisconsin Policy Forum report.

Following recent changes, Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) policies and protocols generally align with national reform efforts with respect to use of force, which has generated the most attention over the last year.

Regarding “the appropriate role of police in the community, our review finds early signs of progress but opportunity to do more; while for lower profile but still important functions such as transparency, data collection, and information dissemination, we see opportunities for continued attention and reform,” the report says.

Even before the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Milwaukee encountered several high-profile incidents of alleged police misconduct that generated calls for reform and spurred city officials to examine possible changes.

As calls for police reform further intensified during the last year, the Forum was asked by Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett to conduct research that would help frame additional reform discussions. This report explores current policies of MPD as they relate to prominent police reforms being suggested or pursued locally or nationally – as well as how Milwaukee compares to five peer cities: Baltimore, Kansas City, Mo., Memphis, Minneapolis, and Tucson. Only MPD policies in place as of April 15, 2021 were analyzed for the purposes of this report.

Also, it is important to note that the report analyzes the content of MPD policies and protocols but does not speak to MPD practices.

“What this report does not tell us is how MPD’s policies and protocols are being implemented on the street, as well as how they are being internally promoted and enforced by the department’s leadership,” the report says.

We organize our discussion of reform proposals into six “buckets”: re-imagining public safety, use of force, data collection and record-keeping, accountability and transparency, training and support, and demilitarization.

Key findings from our report include:

- **Little action has occurred so far to defund police nationally.** Minneapolis is the only peer city we analyzed that redirected funding from its police department budget in 2021, and that \$8 million shift was much more modest than what its city council had originally considered.
- **Milwaukee's specialized co-responder crisis intervention teams don't have the capacity to respond to all relevant calls.** The teams, comprised of behavioral health professionals and specially trained police officers, respond to certain MPD calls. But these efforts are not as expansive as in some peer cities, and the city is considering additional strategies to divert certain police calls to trained clinicians.
- **Milwaukee's violence prevention efforts have expanded in recent years but are not as robust as those in some peer cities.** The Office of Violence Prevention has a budget of \$3.7 million, compared to similar offices in Minneapolis and Baltimore with budgets of \$6.7 million and \$19.4 million respectively,
- **Milwaukee's use-of-force policies have been strengthened** and are similar to those of peer cities. Actions taken by Milwaukee's Fire and Police Commission (FPC) in December 2020 strengthen MPD's use-of-force policies and bring the department in line with the recommendations of the 8 Can't Wait campaign, a frequently cited national advocacy effort.
- **MPD does not publish data on its use of no-knock warrants.** MPD leaders say the use of no-knock entries has declined in recent years and rules governing the use of this practice have been strengthened, but they have not been prohibited and data on their use have not been released.
- **Milwaukee lacks civilian participation to review critical incidents.** MPD maintains a review board of only department members and a separate committee that reviews officer conduct. Baltimore, Memphis, Minneapolis, and Tucson have review boards comprised primarily of community members, and Kansas City's Office of Community Complaints plays a similar role.
- **MPD lacks a formal whistleblower protection policy for police officers.** Though MPD's Code of Conduct states that officers "will not be punished" for reporting a violation of the Code, MPD protocols lack an explicit whistleblower policy that defines that protection and support for its officers, as exists or are being developed in Baltimore, Kansas City, and Memphis.
- **Certain MPD policies cannot be scrutinized because they are not publicly available.** For example, both tear gas and pepper spray are authorized to be used in certain situations – pepper spray can no longer be used during a peaceful protest per a recent policy update - but MPD's policies regarding their use are heavily redacted.

We hope this research will assist policymakers and the general public in reaching a shared understanding of how MPD's current policies and protocols stand with regard to national police reform discussions and help in their consideration of policy changes that will improve MPD operations, its relationship with residents, and the safety of all Milwaukee residents.

Click here to read the report: "Taking Stock: Milwaukee Police Department policies and protocols in the context of national reform."

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