

Pres. Hines Applauds Governor Doyle, Milwaukee Delegation for Passing SB 176, Calls for Further Reforms

My sincere thanks go out to Governor Jim Doyle, State Senator Spencer Coggs, State Representative Barbara Toles and the entire Milwaukee delegation for making SB 176 a reality. Police officers put their lives on the line every day for Milwaukee residents, but they are not above the law and they must be accountable for their actions. Now, because Governor Doyle has signed this bill into law, the chief of police has the authority to offer real consequences for abuses within the department.

Despite today's significant achievement, however, we must remember that we had a very similar policy in place less than 30 years ago. The situation was different – police answered to an autonomous, powerful police chief who wielded immense power over his officers – but the law was largely the same. In response to that chief's overarching authority, a bill was passed that allowed officers to receive pay throughout their appeal process. With today's action, we once again witness the pendulum of power swinging away from officers and back to the chief.

I celebrate and commend this restoration of power to its proper place. But we must not be afraid to address critical questions that still face our city: How do we protect police personnel and ensure that they are not trampled on as they have been in times past? How do we make the entire police system accountable to residents? At the end of the day, why is there no elected official who answers to the public for police actions?

I believe that our current head of the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), Chief Edward Flynn, is off to a great start. He is obviously engaged and committed to making Milwaukee safer. Nevertheless, we must fix this system. We cannot merely watch ultimate power vacillate back and forth between police personnel and chiefs every few years.

There must be a greater level of accountability for how MPD operates. I continue to believe that the mayor should appoint the chief of police, so that average citizens can have a say in evaluating police performance when they go to the polls.

Thanks to this new legislation, officer abuses will now be checked appropriately by Chief Flynn. But for the sake of future chiefs, future officers – and future generations of Milwaukeeans – we must be willing to risk a wholesale improvement of the system. As our city's top elected official, the mayor of Milwaukee should be the one to provide ultimate accountability for the police department. Milwaukee's mayor should be the one to appoint the chief of police.