

Republican state legislators file bill to limit - Knoxville Enlightener (TN) - February 13, 2019 - page 1

February 13, 2019 | Knoxville Enlightener (TN) | Page 1

.On Monday, at the start of Black History month, Tennessee republicans filed a bill that will limit the powers of the state's Community Oversight Boards (COB).

All eyes in the state are focused on the legislature because three cities; Knoxville, Murfreesboro, and Chattanooga are looking to start their own versions of the board, and Memphis already has one.

The bill, HB0658, sponsored by Representative Michael Curcio and supported by Majority Leader William Lamberth, would remove subpoena powers from the board, reducing the ability of the board's investigative role.

Nashville citizens supported the creation of the board, voting for it overwhelmingly in the August 6 election. The establishment of a Community Oversight Board had been pursued for years but received recent traction from the recent killings of unarmed Black men, Jocques Clemmons and **Daniel Hambrick**, by Nashville police.

Opponents of the bill say it unfairly discriminates against African Americans, other racial minorities, and low-income rural communities that envision healthy police-community relations as a public safety issue and that it "negates popular control and is averse to small government."

"The bill filed by GOP legislators regarding our Community Oversight Board is state government overreach, plain and simple," said state Rep. John Ray Clemmons (D-Nashville). "The residents of Nashville spoke loudly and clearly last November — we want transparency and accountability from our police department. Out-of-county lawmakers seem to have no interest in respecting the will of the voters. This new bill is a direct assault on the expressed wishes of Nashville to ensure transparency and accountability for all of our families, and I'll work to ensure that the Community Oversight Board is protected."

Nashville Mayor Briley responded to the state legislature, by issuing the following statement: "The members of the COB represent the diversity of our city, from three highly respected former law enforcement officers and a former state Attorney General to community activists and neighborhood advocates. Better yet, this body was approved by the Metro Council after a very competitive process. Each member of the 11-member COB has stepped forward to serve Nashville and help create a safer and more equitable criminal justice system."

"On Feb. 12, I will convene the first meeting of Nashville's COB. I will continue to support the process as we move forward together, as a body and a city, to begin this important work."

On Tuesday, the group Community Oversight Now held a press conference announcing a new

campaign in response to the legislative preemption.

The group's "Don't Play Where You're Not Welcome" campaign will target the top-ranked football and basketball high school athletes (classes of 2020 and 2021) encouraging them to withdraw their support from Tennessee's colleges and universities.

"This includes the top 300 football players and top 100 basketball players in the country as designated by recruitment sites such as ESPN 300 and Rivals.com, as well as the first and second team all-state athletes in Tennessee and other Mid-South states. The withdrawal of support means we are making a vigorous effort to steer these athletes away from Tennessee institutions and to accept athletic scholarships elsewhere," said group representatives.

"The recruitment of top-ranked athletes is the bread and butter of Tennessee's sports economy.

For example, the University of Tennessee football team brought in more money (\$106 million) than the University of Alabama football program in 2017 and its basketball program is ranked #1 in the nation. Successful athletic programs and the revenue they generate spill over into local economies and impact small businesses. The loss of 2 or 3 football players (out of a 25-member recruitment class) can adversely impact a program for years."

Community Oversight Now plans to nationalize the plan to

inform out-of-state

recruits "about

Representatives Curcio and Lamberth's efforts to make Tennessee an unsafe environment."

Educational institutions that have supported police accountability measures and 14th amendment equal protection claims, such as community colleges and historically black colleges and universities, will be exempted from the campaign.

"We are calling on Tennessee lawmakers to vote NO on HB 658," said Community Oversight Now officials. "We are calling on the Governor, Lt. Governor, Senator Leadership, and people of good will to reject this discriminatory legislation. Additionally, we are exploring all legal options to prevent state preemption."

Copyright (c) 2019, Pride Publishing Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved.