

Strip Search Bill Strips Clothes and Dignity

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Senate Bill 248 removes the current requirement that a person be arrested or detained for at least twelve hours before they are strip searched. We have a strip search problem in Milwaukee. One attorney I spoke with has 14 cases of unlawful strip searches pending in federal court. Were their "crimes" worthy of this level of humiliation?

MILWAUKEE - Today, Sen. Nikiya Harris Dodd and I held a press conference on Senate Bill 248, which will likely make its way to the Senate Floor soon. I opposed the bill when it was before me in the Senate Judiciary Committee and will continue to shine a light on the practice of strip searching non-violent temporary detainees.

This bill, as you might remember, removes the current requirement that a person be arrested or detained for at least twelve hours before they are strip searched. I absolutely hear what the Wisconsin State Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association and the Badger State Sheriffs Association are saying in support of SB-248.

I get that smaller communities have space challenges that make it difficult to hold a person in their own holding room or cell for twelve hours, and I agree that we must keep prisoners and jail staff safe. However, just as the current strip search regulations present challenges for smaller communities, SB-248 would create greater challenges in places like Milwaukee where the current regulations already create a climate full of full of abuse.

There is documented proof that we have a strip search problem in Milwaukee. In June 2013, Devin Raglan was a passenger in a car with two male friends. They were stopped by the police. When a bullet and marijuana were found on the driver, Raglan was also patted down. Next, however, Ragland was forced to drop his pants. An officer felt his testicles through his basketball shorts and when backup officers arrived, one pulled Ragland's shorts and underwear away.

Ragland was arrested for being a minor with cigarettes—certainly a crime, but a crime worthy of this level of humiliation? I think not.

Ragland's story is just one of many. A Milwaukee attorney I spoke with has 14 cases of unlawful strip searches pending in federal court. One involves a man who was strip searched in a Milwaukee jail. Officers thought he had drugs in his rectum so they made him attempt to defecate into a box on the floor to evacuate the drugs. I hate to spoil the ending for you, but this man had no drugs.

I understand that law enforcement in smaller and mid-sized communities feel current law is insufficient to protect them. But current law and SB-248 are insufficient to protect Milwaukeeans. I attempted unsuccessfully to amend the bill in committee and will continue to do my best to limit the likelihood you or someone you know may be unnecessarily subjected to this humiliating practice.

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