



Missouri Senate bill would expand St. Louis Sheriff's reach

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The Missouri Legislature has proposed legislation designed to expand where St. Louis sheriff's deputies can make arrests.

The proposal would give deputies the option of receiving training from the Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission, which will allow them to make arrests anywhere police officers can. Currently, St. Louis deputies generally only enforce courtroom security, transport prisoners and deliver summons but are not considered full law enforcement officers.

Sheriff's deputies in every other Missouri department do not have those rigid guidelines.

The measure passed the Senate in March, and a similar bill was heard by a House committee Tuesday.

“We have a real situation in the city when it comes to high crime,” the House bill's sponsor and Democratic Rep. Michael Butler of St. Louis said. The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department was also short-staffed, he added. “We need all hands on deck.”

St. Louis currently has 133 open police officer positions.

Vernon Betts, sheriff for the city of St. Louis, said the certification would make his department eligible for more funding through grants, and he said his deputies would benefit from the extra preparation.

“I have deputies that can't spell 'sheriff,’” he said. “We need to be trained. We need to make sure that the citizens of St. Louis get the best and most qualified employees that work at the sheriff's department as we could possibly have.”

Jimmie Edwards, the director of St. Louis' public safety department, said he was concerned about chain-of-command issues that could arise from both the police and sheriff's departments having similar arrest powers. Sheriff's deputies could already detain people during protests, he said, even if they couldn't arrest them.

“It brings up a lot of questions,” he said about the proposal.

The Senate bill's sponsor, Democratic Sen. Jamilah Nasheed of St. Louis, said that her proposal wouldn't change the law that lists the St. Louis police department as the city's

sole law enforcement body; it would only make it easier for deputies to assist police officers if the need arose.

During the House hearing, lawmakers also expressed concern over how much the training would cost. Legislative researchers estimated the cost of training one deputy would be at least \$4,400. The St. Louis department has 165 deputies.

Proponents of the bill responded that deputies would only be eligible for the training. The city would not be forced to spend money it didn't have.

The Senate bill is now in the House, while the House bill has not yet received committee approval.