

STATE SENATOR LaTonya Johnson

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

6TH DISTRICT

Chairman James and members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill (SB 568)—which creates a state task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

I, like many others in our state and across this nation, bear witness to a silent epidemic plaguing our communities: the disproportionate violence faced by African American women and girls.

Non-Hispanic Black women have the highest rate of dying by homicide when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, African American women and girls are reported missing at astonishingly high rates, accounting for 36% of the total missing women and girls in the United States in 2022 alone.

It is past time that we find and address the factors that enable this senseless violence. SB 568 is one small step towards addressing this disturbing trend.

I consider it an honor and privilege to serve in a body that focuses on all sorts of issues facing our state. However, sometimes it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge an issue exists even if a solution or solutions have not yet been identified. That's why this task force will be composed of law enforcement experts, experts in the field of gender violence, and African American women who have experienced gendered violence firsthand. By having a meaningful dialogue, empowering impacted communities, raising awareness, and holding our public safety systems accountable, we can begin to identify where our policies fall short in protecting African American women and girls.

To be clear, this task force is not just about unearthing more statistics; it is about saving human lives. It is about honoring the memory of those who have lost their lives, bringing home those who are missing, protecting those at risk, and building a future where every Black woman and girl can live safely and thrive.

Once again, thank you to committee members for your consideration of this important piece of legislation, and thank you to my co-authors—Sen. James, Rep. Stubbs, and Rep. Schraa for their work on this bipartisan bill.



March 6th, 2024

Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 568

Relating to: creating a task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

Dear Committee Members:

Wisconsin is facing significantly higher rates of violence towards African American women than the national average, and we need to take action to help address this burdening issue.

According to an investigative report published by The Guardian, African American women are increasingly becoming targets of femicide, which is the intentional killing of someone based on their gender. The rate of African American femicide nationwide increased by 33% from 2019 to 2020, topping out at 8 per 100,000, four times the rate of femicide in the white population at 2 per 100,000. Wisconsin, by comparison, had a femicide rate of 10.1 per 100,000 in 2019. The rate of homicide among African American women and girls peaked in Wisconsin in 2020 at a staggering 20.2 per 100,000.

Unfortunately, African American women also go missing at a higher rate than the average population. In 2022, the total amount of missing Black women and girls rose to 97,924. Strikingly, African American women account for just slightly over 36% of the total missing women and girls in the United States, despite Black women and girls only making up about 13.9% of the population.

Senate Bill 568 creates a task force to explore the forces behind the alarming statistics. The mission of the task force would be to explore the causes behind violence that African American women and girls experience, appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data on violence against African American women and girls, policies and institutions that impact violence, and any measures necessary to address and reduce the violence. The task force will be required to submit a final report covering their findings by December 15th 2024.

Thank you again for your time. I am happy to take any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jesse James'.

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District



March 6, 2024

Senate Bill 568—Relating to: creating a task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

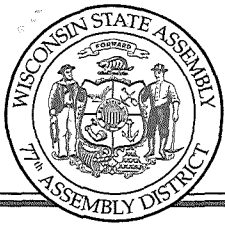
Good afternoon Senator Chairman Jesse James, Senator Vice Chairwoman Rachael Cabral-Guevara, and Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 568—Relating to: creating a task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

First, I would like to thank my co-authors, Representative Michael Schraa, Senator Jesse James, and Senator LaTonya Johnson for their bipartisan collaboration on this bill. I would like to specially thank Senator James for giving SB 568 the opportunity to be heard in this house. I would also like to thank Ms. Georgia Hill, who will be testifying in favor of SB 568 today. Ms. Hill's daughter, Lasheky Hill, disappeared in Racine, Wisconsin on March 26th, 2023, one day before her 46th birthday. She still has not been found.

Additionally, I would like to recognize and thank Attorney General Josh Kaul and the Department of Justice Staff, my mother Linda Hoskins, Chief Dr. Shon Barnes of the Madison Police Department, Mariah Cooley Midwest Regional Advocate Associate for Community Justice Action Fund, the members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated: Wisconsin Delegation, Minnesota Senate President Bobby Joe Champion, Minnesota State Senator Mary Kunesh, Antonia Drew Norton, Director of the Asha Project, March for Our Lives, Black Feminist Future, constituent advocates of the 77th district, and community advocates for their generous letters of support and ongoing advocacy for this bill. I would additionally like to thank Also, I would like to thank my colleagues in the assembly for their support in getting this bill passed in the assembly. Finally, I would like to thank my staff and interns for their hard work and dedication to this legislation.

Today, I would like to express my utmost support for SB 568 because it represents a comprehensive strategy for addressing the disproportionate levels of violence African American women and girls face in our state of Wisconsin. SB 568 is necessary to improve the mechanisms for preventing, investigating, and healing from all forms of gender-based violence in our state, which impact women and girls of all racial backgrounds, but which affect Black women and girls at the highest rate.

In 2020, Wisconsin was the state with the highest homicide rate of African American women and girls in our nation, **20.2 per 100,000**. Additionally, the Black female homicide rate in Wisconsin doubled from 2019 to 2020, rising from **10.1 per 100,000** to **20.2 per 100,000**. Underlying this startling rate of Black female homicide are various other forms of violence: sexual violence, gun violence, and domestic violence, all of which African American women across the nation suffer at higher rates than their white counterparts.



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Shelia Stubbs

77TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

The challenges to addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls are numerous. First, we are lacking crucial data, especially in Wisconsin. Furthermore, the data already gathered is insufficient and lacks critical detail to understand the circumstances of violence. Additionally, this crisis lacks public and media attention and care. According to some sources, the press is 4 times more likely to report on the disappearance of a white person versus a person of color. Compounding on the lack of public and media attention, inaction from law enforcement and the criminal justice system also plays a major role in the racial disparities between outcomes of missing persons and homicide cases.

SB 568 would create a Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls Task Force in the Wisconsin Department of Justice. The task force must be established by the attorney general and must consist of members who are knowledgeable in crime victims' rights or violence protection and who work in a range of relevant positions as specified in the bill. The task force must examine various factors that contribute to violence against African American women and girls and submit to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature by December 15, 2024, a report on actions that can be taken to eliminate violence against African American women and girls.

This **17-member** task force would consist of legislators, law enforcement experts, community partners that address violence impacting Black women and girls, and Black victims of gender-based violence and their families. The task force would be charged with collecting data on this issue, providing support to victims and their families, and identifying and addressing the underlying structural issues that contribute to the crisis we see today. This would not be the first task force developed to address racial disparities in violent crime victimization in our state: in 2020, the Department of Justice launched its Missing and Murdered Indigenous Task Force, which was tasked with the similar goal of examining and addressing violence affecting Native people in Wisconsin.

This Task Force will specifically investigate Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls because of all women in our state, they are the most likely to be victimized by violence. However, it must not be understated that by getting to the hidden roots of this violence and combating them, we will consequently prevent and reduce violence for all women in Wisconsin, especially those who belonging to vulnerable populations. I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration of this testimony to the importance of SB 568 to our fight as a state to prevent and address gender-based violence against African American women and girls, those who are at the greatest risk. I hope that my testimony has left you better informed about the need for this bill and its potential to save and transform lives in our state. I ask you to vote yes for SB 568. I am happy to answer any questions.

STATE CAPITOL / P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708

TELEPHONE / (608) 266-3784 TOLL FREE / (888) 534-0077 EMAIL / rep.stubbs@legis.wisconsin.gov



MICHAEL SCHRAA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 53RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Madison, WI 53708

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Rep.Schraa@legis.wi.gov

Testimony in Support Assembly Bill 615/Senate Bill 568

Thank you, Chairman James and members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 615 and its Senate Companion, Senate Bill 568. This legislation will create a task force specifically to address the problem of missing and murdered African American women and girls.

First, I would like to provide some context on why this is necessary. The Department of Justice does maintain a website that includes pages for missing persons, unidentified cases, and unsolved cases. Every case represents an individual's tragic story and a family hoping for answers. Not every case is listed on the website; only the ones requested by local law enforcement agencies are included. Once they are on the page, they remain until their case is solved or until the family or law enforcement agency requests that they be removed, so you will find missing persons from age 14 to age 104 listed on the website. Yet, if you look carefully, there are not many African American women and girls listed.

National statistics indicate that violence, murder, and missing persons status disproportionately affects Black women. We in Wisconsin want to get to the root of this issue. This task force has less than a year to accomplish its work of extensive study resulting in a report due on January 1 of 2025. I admire Rep. Stubbs because her vision is not just to study the causes and solutions to the problem going forward, but to actually locate some of these missing women and solve some of these heinous crimes. This task force will not unravel all of the complex problem of violence directed to African American women and girls, but it is a significant step forward.

In closing, I appreciate the bipartisan group of legislators who have cosponsored this bill. I will be happy to respond to your questions along with my fellow authors.



Madison Police Department

Shon F. Barnes, Chief of Police

Mailing Address:

City-County Building

211 S. Carroll St.

Madison, WI 53703

Phone: (608) 266-4022 | Fax: (608) 266-4855

Public Building Entrance at 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Madison, WI

madisonpolice.com

March 6, 2024

RE: In Support of AB 615, SB568

Dear Representative Stubbs,

I am writing this letter to show my support for Assembly Bill 615, Senate Bill 568 for the creation of the Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls Task Force.

The statistics show African American women and girls go missing and are murdered at disproportionately higher rates in Wisconsin than their white counterparts. Statistics also show that these incidents are underreported to law enforcement.

The creation of this task force would allow for a collaborative effort between key stakeholders, including law enforcement, legislators, legal services, advocacy and victim services, and violence prevention to examine the systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls, and work to develop the prevention measures necessary to eliminate this violence.

One of the challenges for law enforcement is developing trust within the communities that are disproportionately affected by violence. This task force, which would also include survivors with lived experiences, would provide valuable information on further steps that law enforcement can take to develop trust and legitimacy within this community.

All members of our communities deserve to feel safe and protected from becoming victims of violence. The creation of this task force would be an instrumental step forward in working to stop violence against African American women and girls in our communities.

Sincerely,

Chief Shon F. Barnes

March 4, 2024

Room 7 North
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Support for Bill AB 615/ SB 568 (Stubbs)

Dear Representative Stubbs,

On behalf of March for Our Lives, we are proud to support **AB Bill 615/SB 568** known as the Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls. The Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls will examine the systemic causes behind the violence, appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data, propose institutional policies and practices that are effective in reducing gender violence, and more.

March for Our Lives is a youth-focused organization committed to preventing gun violence by actively involving young people. Originating in response to a high school mass shooting, we recognize the broader impact on Black and brown communities, and we are dedicated to addressing these challenges purposefully. Alarming statistics highlighted by the Giffords Law Center reveal a 78% increase in gun homicide rates among Black women and girls from 2019 to 2022, marking the most substantial rise among women of any racial or ethnic group. Disturbingly, a study conducted by Everytown for Gun Safety showed that Black women face a threefold higher likelihood of being fatally shot by an intimate partner, with those aged 18 to 34 being at the most significant risk. Our dedication to combating gun violence encompasses a comprehensive understanding of its various manifestations, with a particular focus on marginalized communities.

Just last year, Black women and girls made up approximately 18% of all missing persons cases despite accounting for about 7% of the population, according to data from the National Crime Information Center and U.S. Census Bureau. In 2022, 97,926 Black women were filed as missing persons in the US and at least four black women per day were killed in this country.

The creation of this task force is crucial to Wisconsin, whereas Wisconsin has the highest homicide rates for Black women and girls. This task force will bring together elected officials, the police department, judges, advocacy groups, and African American women who are survivors of gender violence to work collaboratively and save lives.

For these reasons, March for Our Lives is proud to support **AB 615/SB568**.

Sincerely,

Madelyn Cobb, State Policy Manager



March 6, 2024

Letter of Support for SB 568

To the Honorable Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature:

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, is a national public service organization with more than 300,000 college-educated African American women of which In Wisconsin, there are seven chapters across the state . We are also a non-partisan organization. Our Wisconsin chapters write in strong support of Assembly Bill 615 which aims to establish a task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

For generations, African American women and girls have faced an epidemic of violence. They are more likely to experience homicide, sexual assault, and other forms of violence than their white counterparts, and these cases often go unsolved or receive less attention. This epidemic of violence is a complex issue with deep-rooted historical and systemic causes, requiring comprehensive and coordinated action to address. We commend Rep. Shelia Stubbs and co-sponsors of the bill for recognizing the disproportionate impact of violence against African American women and girls, a crisis demanding immediate and multifaceted action.

The establishment of a task force, as outlined in this bill, is a critical step toward understanding the contributing factors to this epidemic and devising effective solutions. We particularly applaud the emphasis on:

- Expertise: Requiring the task force to include members with deep knowledge of crime victims' rights, violence prevention, and relevant professional backgrounds ensures a nuanced and informed approach.

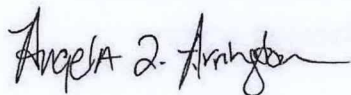
- Holistic Examination: Examining the multi-faceted factors contributing to the violence, including racism, sexism, economic vulnerability, and access to justice, is crucial to dismantling the root causes.
- Actionable Recommendations: By requiring the task force to submit a report with concrete recommendations for legislative action, the bill ensures that the research translates into tangible progress.

As a sorority dedicated to empowering Black women and girls, we are deeply invested in the success of this initiative. We believe the task force's findings and recommendations will be invaluable in informing legislative action, policy changes, and community-based programs to prevent future tragedies and ensure justice for victims and their families. Our Sorority has been supporting efforts for Missing Murdered persons of color for several years. This support has come in the form of resolutions and partnerships with National organizations.

We urge you to pass SB 568 without delay. This legislation represents a crucial step towards a future where African American women and girls can live safely and thrive. We stand ready to work with you, both within and outside the halls of power, to ensure that the task force's recommendations lead to meaningful legislative and societal change. We stand ready to work alongside the legislature, community organizations, and other stakeholders to achieve this goal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Angela Arrington

WI State Social Action Coordinator

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated

dstwistatesac@gmail.com

The Asha Project * 3719 W. Center Street * Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 252-0075. Fax: (414) 252-0076 * www.ashafamilyservices.org

January 12, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

The Asha Project, (Asha) an initiative with End Domestic Abuse WI, is excited to submit this letter in support for *AB 615 Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls Task Force*.

Asha, was established in 1987 and is the first culturally specific African American domestic and sexual violence prevention agency in WI and is also known as one of the first in the U.S. Antonia Drew Norton, known to field of gender-based violence as Antonia Drew Vann, is Asha's founder. Asha's work for over 3 decades continues to bring to the forefront, the authentic voices, plights and cries of African American women victims and survivors marginalized due to class, sexism and racialized oppression and neglect.

According to data from the National Crime Information Center, it is currently estimated as of 2023, more than 97,000 Black women are missing in the United States. The FBI indicates that African Americans make up 14 percent of the U.S. population; however, they represent 37% of the missing.¹ FBI data indicates that Whites who make up 75% of the US population only represent 59% of the missing.² This overrepresentation is striking just as it similarly is for Black women who are gender-based homicide victims in the U.S. and in WI.

So many lives and potential are absent, and this concern continues to remain virtually unidentified. *AB 615* legislation is a step towards the light to bring voice, awareness, and justice for missing and murdered African American women and girls in WI.

I strongly urge your support for this legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact Antonia Drew Norton (Vann) at (414) 517-8179 or antoniaadv@gmail.com

Sincerely,



Antonia Drew Norton
Director, The Asha Project
3719 W. Center St. Milwaukee, WI 53210

end
abuse

THE ASHA PROJECT is an initiative of End Domestic Abuse WI

¹ <https://www.statista.com/topics/2153/crime-in-the-united-states/#topicOverview>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/2022-ncic-missing-person-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>

Senator Mary Kunesh
District 41
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Ave West
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606



Senate

State of Minnesota

March 6, 2024

Dear Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families Members,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 568, the creation of a Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls through the Wisconsin legislature. As the author of Minnesota's Missing and Murdered Black Women Task Force, I am pleased to extend my support to our neighboring state's efforts to address the historic violence to Black women and girls.

For years, impacted communities have been elevating this injustice and pushing for solutions. We know that for much too long, Black women and girls have been uniquely vulnerable and ignored, thus excluded from public discussions and real solutions around missing and murdered people. Minnesota's report illustrates a devastating picture of the magnitude of the issue: over 60,000 Black women and girls are missing in the United States, and Black women are more than twice as likely than their peers to be victims of homicide. As legislators, it is our responsibility to ensure safety and justice for all of our constituents and to work toward solutions. Senate Bill 568 is the first step for Wisconsin as it was for Minnesota.

Horrifyingly, Black women are nearly three times more likely to be murdered than White women in Minnesota – a fact that had not been illustrated until the completion of the Minnesota's own MMBW task force was completed. By creating the Missing and Murdered African American Women's Task Force in 2021, the Minnesota Legislature became the first U.S. state to dedicate resources to investigate and to consider the measures necessary to reduce and prevent violence against Black women and girls. I hope that Wisconsin joins us in this endeavor and would be proud to collaborate in the best way possible to make it happen.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or for resource ideas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Kunesh', written in a cursive style.

Mary Kunesh
Minnesota Senate
Assistant Majority Leader



March 6, 2024

Room 7 North
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 615/Senate Bill 568 (Stubbs)

Dear Representative Stubbs,

On behalf of Black Feminist Future, we are proud to support **AB Bill 615/SB568** known as the Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls. The Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls will examine the systemic causes behind the violence, appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data, propose institutional policies and practices that are effective in reducing gender violence, and more.

Black Feminist Future (BFF) is a political hub and member-centered organization that galvanizes the social and political power of Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people to defeat misogynoir and advance Black feminisms. For the collective liberation of Black people, BFF nourishes the leadership of Black feminists, fortifies aligned organizations and movements, and shifts cultural norms.

Last year, Black women and girls made up approximately 18% of all missing persons cases despite accounting for about 7% of the population, according to data from the National Crime Information Center and U.S. Census Bureau.

In 2022, 97,926 Black women were filed as missing persons in the US and at least 4 black women per day were killed in this country. The creation of this taskforce is crucial to Wisconsinites whereas Wisconsin has the highest homicide rates for Black women and girls. This task force will bring together elected officials, the police department, judges, advocacy groups, and African American women who are survivors of gender violence to work collaboratively and save lives.

For these reasons, Black Feminist Future is proud to support **AB 615/SB568**.

Sincerely,

Sadie Dean
Managing Director of Programs
Black Feminist Future



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Jesse James, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

FROM: Barbara Sella, Executive Director

DATE: March 6, 2024

RE: SB 568 and AB 615, Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Senate Bill 568 and Assembly Bill 615, which create a state task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

Others today will provide statistics on the rising number of missing and killed African American women and girls in Wisconsin. What we would like to stress is that such a task force is needed not just to shed light on the causes of and solutions to this violence, but also to raise public awareness of a situation that too often is ignored.

For too long, African American victims of violence have not attracted the attention or sympathy of the larger community. This has included the Catholic Church. As the U.S. bishops note in *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, "All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others."¹

We support this legislation, not just because of our belief in the equal dignity of every human life, but also for the sake of the common good. Each human being is made in the image and likeness of God and violence against one member affects us all because we are one human family. When any resident of our state goes missing or is murdered, it is not just a loss for that person, but for the community. When these tragedies happen, we must not look away. Instead, we must confront the situation and help our community.

We must all strive to do better. We must all search for ways to eliminate violence, no matter where it occurs, and to help victims, families, and communities heal. We must be in solidarity with each other across racial, political, social, economic, and religious divides.

This task force is a first step, but it will take everyone working together to uphold the life and dignity of every human person in Wisconsin.

We thank the authors of these bills for having the foresight and courage to bring this bipartisan legislation forward and we strongly urge you to support it. Thank you.

¹ www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf