



JOHN SPIROS

State Representative • 86th Assembly District

Assembly Bill 293 Testimony June 11, 2025

Hello, and thank you Chairman Swearingen and members of the Assembly State Affairs Committee for allowing me to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 293.

AB 293 changes a date from July 1, 2025 to July 1, 2027 from a program that was enacted into law in 2021. It is a very simple bill.

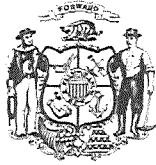
Let me provide you some context of why we need this bill today. In 2021, Sen. Wanggaard and I were authors of SB 124 and its counterpart AB 258. SB 124 passed on a 33-0 vote in the Senate and on a voice vote in the Assembly. This bill became 2021 WI Act 51 and it established a community-oriented policing house grant program, or a COP House program. In the 2023-2025 budget (2023 WI Act 19), \$500,000 was appropriated for the program.

The 2021 bill was a recommendation from the Speaker's Task Force on Racial Disparities chaired by former Representative Jim Steineke and Representative Sheila Stubbs. The goal was to increase the community involvement with the police and build relationships between the two by integrating COP houses into the fabric of the neighborhood.

The COP house program is structured so that vacant homes in high crime areas are purchased, renovated, and staffed by police officers. The house is open to the public during certain hours so that community members can interact with the officers in the community. The officers who staff the house look to build relationships with the residents and learn the needs of the neighborhood to increase safety and reduce crime. The city of Racine has seen great success by implementing COP houses in high crime neighborhoods.

Stakeholders in the Milwaukee area are currently working to create a COP House on the Milwaukee's south side with the hope to increase safety in the area. Both the WI Chiefs of Police and the City of Milwaukee support AB293. AB 293 is a bipartisan bill that extends the date from July 1, 2025 to July 1, 2027 so the COP House program does not sunset.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to share testimony in support of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions.



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 293

Thank you, committee members, for attending today's hearing on Assembly Bill 293. I appreciate the committee chair adding this bill to the hearing yesterday.

The good news is that this may be the simplest bill that will come before this committee. It simply changes a date from July 1, 2025 to July 1, 2027. That's it.

Since you probably want a little more information on the bill, I guess I can share some. This bill extends the sunset on the \$500,000 Community-Oriented Policing House (or COP House) grant program from the end of this biennium until the end of the next biennium.

COP Houses have been used with great success in Racine and elsewhere across the country, and it's easy to see why. Police officers perform daily duties in the facility, while building relationships as a member of a neighborhood. The police become a positive part of the neighborhood, rather than an occupying force to keep eyes on you or tell you that you're in trouble. COP Houses build relationships. Each COP House becomes a part of the community, where people feel safe and can safely access the services they need.

And the statistics prove that COP houses and community policing works. Crime rates plummet, including by up to 70% in some neighborhoods. In just one neighborhood, aggravated assaults dropped by 94% in just four years. It's a true, proven, violence prevention program.

For the last six months or so, I have been working with stakeholders in the City of Milwaukee to create a COP House on Milwaukee's south side, near Cristo Rey School. The underlying COP House grant program needs to be modified to allow the vision of this south side COP House to work. I will be working on separate legislation after the budget on this subject.

This bill just parks the \$500,000 that has already been allocated so that it doesn't get spent elsewhere for the next two years.

Again, it's a simple bill. And the simplest you'll probably hear this year. I hope it has your support.

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