

Two bills born from last summer's protests get approval by senate committee

Committee passes two bills tied to Utah protests

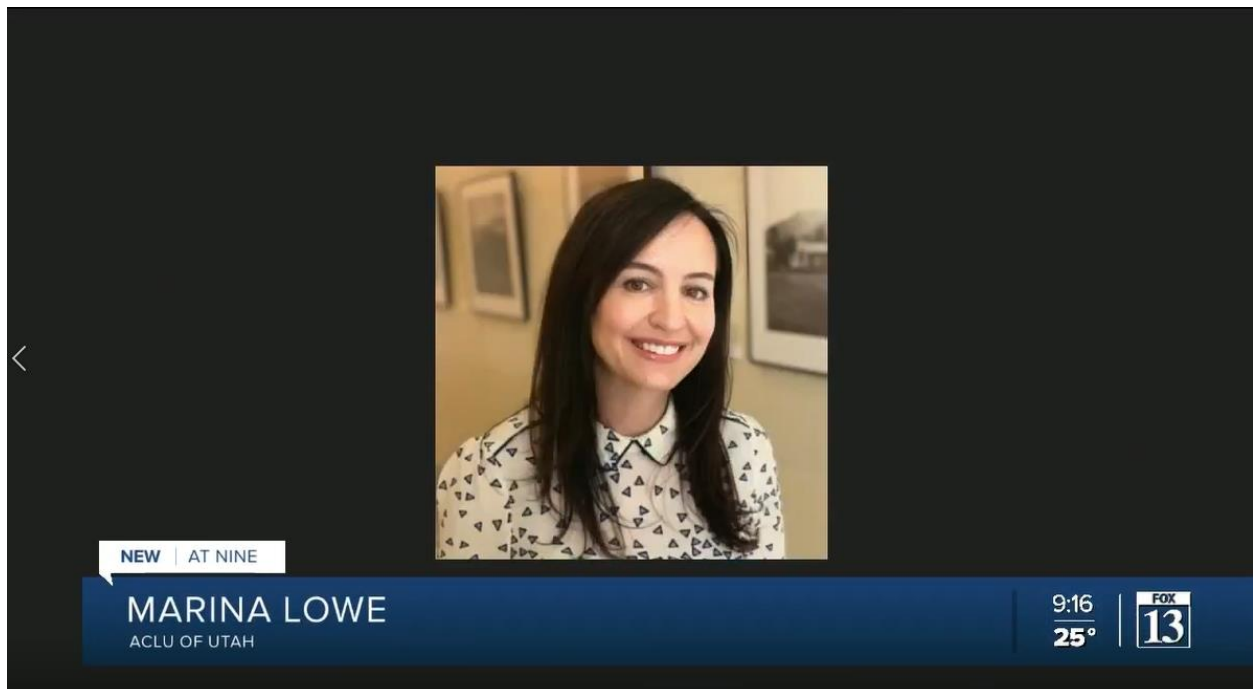
By: [Lauren Steinbrecher](#)

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<https://www.fox13now.com/news/local-news/two-bills-born-from-last-summers-protests-get-approval-by-senate-committee>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6l5k-DsNDA>



SALT LAKE CITY — Two bills on Capitol Hill with links to last summer's protests are moving forward to the Senate floor. While one focuses on protesters who incite violence, another targets police deescalation and arrest training.

The latter received overwhelming support during Wednesday's Senate Judiciary, Law Enforcement, and Criminal Justice Committee.

However, the former saw opposition from organizations like the ACLU of Utah and Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office, while garnering support from citizen groups.

SB 138, the "Violence, Disorder, and Looting Enforcement Protection Act," would impose stricter penalties for rioting, harassment, and assaulting a peace officer during a riot.

Bill sponsor Senator David Hinkins (R-Ferron) and backing group United Citizens Alarm explained the bill's roots during their presentations at the meeting.

They indicated it was born partly out of last summer's May 30th protest downtown after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, that drew thousands of people. During the protest, a handful of people flipped a Salt Lake City Police patrol car on its side and set it on fire.

Some vandalized and damaged buildings and other property. At times, objects including a metal street sign were hurled through the air and directly at police officers.

They also talked about a protest weeks later in Provo, where a man driving near protesters was shot. "I wanted to stand up and support this bill," that man, named Ken Dudley, said at the meeting. "I was the person who was shot in Provo by the rioters. One of the most terrifying things that happened to me," he said.

Dudley went on to say that the person who shot him was later released on bail-- which caused Dudley significant distress and left him wondering if that person would come after his family.

The groups United Citizens Alarm and Civilized Awakening said they don't want to stop protests or free speech, and that to them it's not a race issue-- it's a violence issue.

"Having something like this bill in place would further deter any further damage from rioters, and discourage them from even committing those violent acts in the very first place," said Shannon MacInnes, a concerned citizen who spoke as part of the United Citizens Alarm presentation.

Those who spoke against SB 138 at the Senate committee meeting included the ACLU of Utah, Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office, and the Utah Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

They each pointed out various, specific lines in the bill and talked about problems they saw in the details and language.

Marina Lowe from the ACLU of Utah said they have "grave concerns," and listed off a handful of reasons why.

"This gives immunity to kill or seriously injure others while leaving a riot," Lowe said, of one of her concerns. "I mean, this is a Charlottesville situation and would provide blanket immunity for people who kill or injure others. I think that's very, very problematic."

Steve Burton, a defense attorney and Director of the Utah Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers said the bill would increase penalties and force people to be held without bail in jail until they are proven guilty.

"Additionally, it's ineffective," he said. "It's been shown through studies that increasing penalties is one of the least effective means of deterrent."

Most of the committee expressed being on board with the bill, and said they expect the bill to continue to be further refined and worked on.

"We are not talking about the 99 percent of the protesters that were there, to be seen and to be heard speaking on social issues. We're not targeting them," said Senator Daniel Thatcher (R-West Valley City). "We are targeting the bad actors. We are targeting those who took advantage-- who took advantage-- of a true protest for their own selfish, bad behavior."

The bill passed out of committee, with Senators Luz Escamilla (D-Salt Lake City) and Derek Kitchen (D-Salt Lake City) voting against it.

Before the vote, the committee made and approved a couple of amendments.

"I think that this bill draws that bright line and that clear distinction between a protest and a riot," Sen. Thatcher said.

On the flip side, HB 162-- also with roots in last summer's protests-- addresses police training. The "Peace Officer Training Amendments" bill would require 16 hours of a police officer's 40 hours of annual training to focus on de-escalation, arrest control, and mental health and other crisis intervention responses.

It also requires yearly reporting of those training hours.

Salt Lake City Police Chief Mike Brown spoke in support of the bill, saying that they already do trainings with components of de-escalation, but that the audit part of the bill "will highlight blind spots."

"It's invaluable and it'll help us achieve the kind of policing that our community expects of us," Chief Brown said. "And one thing that it'll do, is it'll create new, broader, deeper curriculums and more availability for all law enforcement across the state."

HB 162 unanimously passed out of committee.

Representative Angela Romero (D-Salt Lake City) said this is a starting point, not an ending point.

"This was an effort between people, because of our peaceful protests and what people may not see as peaceful," Rep. Romero said. "This brought a group of people together. We were meeting every two weeks, talk about policy that we could do together as law enforcement, and as the community, as elected officials, and the executive branch-- and this is what we came up with."