

Bill would ban policing quotas in Utah

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SALT LAKE CITY — Policing quotas would be illegal under a bill approved by the Senate Judiciary, Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Committee on Thursday.

SB154 would prohibit law enforcement agencies or municipalities from imposing any kind of quota on police officers and instead requires officers' performance to be evaluated by model standards unrelated to quotas.

It will stop what its sponsor, Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, calls "policing for profit." Law enforcement should be doing its job to seek compliance with the laws and raise public safety, not collecting revenue, he said.

Stephenson had two former officers with him to testify to the reality and severity of the problem. Eric Moutsos, a former Salt Lake police officer, described an occasion when his sergeant told his squad they had to get five misdemeanor arrests per day. Moutsos got three, and his sergeant was livid, he said. If officers got less than the quota, they had to make up for it with more arrests the next day, Moutsos said. Passing a no-quota bill, he said, is the best thing that could happen for relations between police and the public.

Moutsos made headlines in 2014 after he was placed on leave by then-Salt Lake Police Chief Chris Burbank for allegedly trying to switch assignments to avoid participating in the city's gay pride parade that year. He resigned from the force after his suspension became public.

Jeffery Hardenbrook, a former South Jordan police officer, said every day he started his patrol car, "at least three people were going to get a ticket, period."

Hardenbrook said he has never met a police officer who didn't have an unwritten quota. Quotas foster an antagonistic mindset between the officers and the public, he said.

Sen. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, spoke in favor of the bill, as did representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union and the Libertas Institute.

Salt Lake County Undersheriff Scott Carver said quotas are bad for public relations, but he objected to the bill on grounds that the language was too broad. He suggested that officers might be able to argue that they cannot be required to arrest or stop anyone because of the law.

Sen. Daniel Thatcher, R-West Valley City, held up the Utah Highway Patrol as a model for no-quota policy. UHP does not keep any of the revenue that comes from the tickets troopers write, and they only write tickets if they think that is the best way to ensure compliance with the law, Thatcher said.

The committee approved of the legislation unanimously and sent it to the Senate for consideration.