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ANNAPOLIS — Maryland’s General Assembly will pilot a program to add racial impact statements to the legislative analysis that lawmakers review when they’re considering a new piece of legislation.

The program will focus on criminal justice reform bills this year, House Speaker Adrienne Jones and Senate President Bill Ferguson announced.

Maryland will be the fourth state in the United States to add racial impact statements to legislative analyses, following New Jersey, Connecticut and Iowa, according to Monday’s announcement.

Racial impact statements allow lawmakers to assess how bills will affect minority communities before enacting the legislation.

The state’s Department of Legislative Services, which provides fiscal impact statements for bills moving through the General Assembly, has created a team to provide the racial impact statements on select legislation during the 2021 session.

DLS will work with Bowie State University — the oldest historically Black university in Maryland — and the University of Baltimore’s Schaefer Center for Public Policy to compile data that will be used for the nonpartisan impact statements.

The statements will be available to lawmakers and the public during policy debates.

“There is finally a broader understanding across Maryland and the country of the existence of structural racism — but we have to have better and deeper information in order to reverse its impact,” Jones said in a news release.

Jones became House speaker in 2019 and is the first Black woman in Maryland’s history to hold the position. This year she is pushing a broad racial and economic justice agenda that aims to close race-based economic and health disparities in minority communities.

Maryland lawmakers this year are also moving quickly on a slate of police reform bills in response to the May 25 death of George Floyd, a Black man who died at the hands of police in Minneapolis.

Police reform is a top priority for legislative leaders. The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee this week will hear testimony on a proposal to repeal the Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights, a controversial law that gives police officers enhanced protections during internal disciplinary proceedings.

Other proposals include mandating body cameras and making police disciplinary records accessible to the public.

Del. Jazz Lewis (D-Prince George's County) said he has been working to bring racial impact statements to the legislature for several years.

"We have enough data to know now how to do this, so I'm really glad that Speaker Jones and Senate President Bill Ferguson have worked with me to make this happen this year, especially this past year when inequity has been on the forefront nationally," Lewis said.

Lewis said that he hopes the use of racial impact statements will expand to areas beyond criminal justice if the pilot program succeeds this year. He will watch to see whether the statements are prepared in time to make adjustments if a bill has the potential to do harm.

"I want it to influence the policy process," he said. "The goal isn't to stop policy being made, but it is to make sure we're being just a little bit more intentional."