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Legislators Coleman, Wright-Jones seek local control of police department

JEFFERSON CITY – Saying it is time for a Civil War-era policy to be amended, State Senator Maida Coleman and State Representative Robin Wright-Jones have introduced legislation that would return control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department to the representative democracy in the City of St. Louis and eliminate state control.

During the early days of the Civil War, the State of Missouri, like many other states, took control of its major city's police department, thinking it removed a level of politics and favoritism at a time of national crisis. Local control of police departments returned to most cities like Baltimore, Atlanta, and others that experienced state control by the late 19th or early 20th Centuries. The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department remains governed by a board appointed by the Governor to this day, more than 145 years since the state took control in 1861.

“We think the local representative democracy, the Board of Alderman, should decide how the police department should be managed,” said State Senator Maida Coleman. “St. Louis would be one of the last cities to return to local control of the police department of the cities where the state took control of the police during the Civil War era.”

The legislation proposed by Coleman and Wright-Jones gives authority to create a police department to the St. Louis Board of Alderman. It would be up to the Board of Alderman to decide how the police department is managed. The legislation also preserves the salary and rank structure of the current police department to ensure a smooth transition.

“There is no reason why people from Joplin to St. Joseph have a say in how we run our police department,” said Representative Robin Wright-Jones. “It only makes sense to have our police department under local control with management that has been codified by our city-elected Board of Alderman.”