



Washington Association of
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**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
2025 PRE-SESSION STATEMENT**

WASPC URGES LEGISLATORS TO FOCUS ON JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS & RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

(Lacey, WA) --- Washington State's legislative session begins on January 13, 2025. The [Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs \(WASPC\)](#) will work for nonpartisan, constructive public safety policies, and measures to improve public trust and protect victims. Public safety is a core function of government, is required for communities and businesses to thrive, and should not be a partisan issue.

We believe in balanced public safety laws that support the core functions of government in an environment where the men and women of law enforcement reflect and care for their communities while having the tools to care for victims in their pursuit of justice.

We encourage bipartisan cooperation to enact laws that protect our communities and get people the help they need. Crime is rising, more people are being victimized, and there are not enough resources to deter, intervene, and investigate crimes to reduce victimization, and to get people to the resources they need.

Here are our 2025 legislative priorities to improve public safety and provide justice for victims:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE FUNDING SYSTEM

Washington needs additional law enforcement officers to help victims of crimes and ensure public safety. Too few officers has direct impacts on justice for victims, preventing crime, limits de-escalation, increases the likelihood of the use of force, inhibits capacity to investigate and solve crimes, and prevents community policing efforts. In addition, Public Defenders, Prosecutors, Court Staff, Diversion Programs, Treatment Programs, Jails, etc. all require new, dedicated funding.

WASPC seeks state funding to keep current officers and recruit and retain additional law enforcement officers, and to support and expand capacity for other critical elements of the criminal justice system such as jails, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, clerks, etc. WASPC appreciates all efforts to recognize the state needs to address law enforcement recruitment and retention. We'll evaluate all proposals that may come forward during the session.

JUVENILE ACCESS TO ATTORNEY

Since 2021 a state law requires law enforcement officers to connect a juvenile with an attorney before

asking them to waive their rights (e.g., be interviewed by police). The law fails to recognize the constitutional rights of juveniles, the role of parents/guardians, and has prevented juveniles from providing information to law enforcement officers that may help them clear themselves of guilt. The law has also led to fewer opportunities to divert juveniles from arrest. Data comparing adult and juvenile arrests for 2021 and 2022 shows that juveniles arrests increased 35%, compared to only 6% for adult arrests.

WASPC seeks to modify RCW 13.40.740 to:

1. Allow juveniles to provide an exculpatory statement (evidence that is favorable to a defendant in a criminal trial, helping to prove their innocence or reduce their guilt);
2. Clarify that juvenile victims and witnesses are not required to consult an attorney before cooperating with law enforcement; and
3. Prohibit telephonic attorneys from asserting or waiving a juvenile's rights without the juvenile's consent.

AVIATION SUPPORT/ SEARCH AND RESCUE

Law enforcement aviation support services are provided to every jurisdiction in the state—free of charge— by four counties (King, Snohomish, Chelan, and Spokane). Air support units are invaluable resources in many search and rescue missions, missing persons, and other community-caretaking functions of law enforcement agencies. Air support units can also be used as a vehicular pursuit alternative in some instances and provide crucial officer safety and public safety functions during certain high-risk incidents.

WASPC seeks to establish an ongoing state funded grant program to provide \$10 million per year to:

1. Provide a base amount of funding to local law enforcement air support units that agree to assist any law enforcement agency in Washington when available; and
2. Provide a per-mission reimbursement when a local law enforcement air support unit is deployed on a search and rescue mission.

Public Safety: A Call for Balanced Policies

Public safety is a fundamental responsibility of government. Communities cannot thrive without safety. However, the extreme policy shifts of recent years often overlooked the voices of victims and those seeking stability. Based on our legislative agenda and our "Principles for Community Trust", WASPC will advocate for a more balanced, data-driven, and victim-centered approach to public safety. That means our policy makers need to get out of ideological corners and reject extreme and narrative-based policies. Here's how: use data responsibly, pay more attention to victims, ensure policing is trusted and trustworthy, create meaningful consequences for criminals, and provide treatment and resources when people are ready to break the cycle.

Responsible Use of Data

The dialogue around public safety must be grounded in accurate data rather than narratives that serve political agendas. For instance, discussions about police pursuits and use-of-force incidents often hinge on discredited methodologies that focus solely on population-based comparisons rather than context. Relying on flawed data not only distorts the reality of policing but also undermines efforts to create

effective policy.

A comprehensive understanding of crime data will recognize that what is sometimes viewed as 'minor' crime (such as vehicle theft) impacts lower-income individuals disproportionately. These aren't merely statistics; they represent life-altering events for families struggling to make ends meet. Crime data over the past five years in our state are startling: murders, violent crime, and vehicle theft rates have far exceeded national trends. The data speaks for itself, and it is clear we are on the wrong track.

Prioritize Victims

Many express frustration at the legal system's focus on rehabilitation for perpetrators, often at the expense of those who have suffered harm. Victims of crime, particularly in marginalized communities, deserve recognition and support. When crime is dismissed or minimized, it ignores the devastating ripple effects on victims' lives.

Restore Trust in Law Enforcement

The false narrative that policing itself is the problem has led to dangerous policy decisions, resulting in rising feelings of lawlessness and brazen criminality in some areas. Communities want to feel safe. A strong, well-resourced police presence is essential to restoring that sense of security. Rather than defunding law enforcement, we should invest in evidence-based policing that emphasizes transparency and accountability. This means hiring more officers to enhance de-escalation, ensure adequate training, provide decompression time and improved wellness, provide proper supervision and, most importantly, provide justice for victims.

We have seen a significant decline in traffic enforcement during and after the pandemic, contributing to increased fatalities and reckless behavior on the roads. Reduced staffing has led to a greater sense that there are no guardrails to driving behavior yet advocates in our state will continue their campaign to further restrict policing based on the idea that fewer police contacts creates greater safety, while data shows otherwise. Using the logic that people cannot afford to follow the rules, the advocates propose to eliminate the rules altogether. The same bill allows funds to help people pay for necessary repairs to their cars but prohibits the police from issuing the funds, under the same rationale of demonizing narratives about police.

Meaningful Consequences and Opportunities for Breaking the Cycle

Due to legislative decisions, our state has quietly reduced the number of people incarcerated in state prisons by about 25 percent in the last five years, while the state population has increased, with too few new programs to fill in the gap for re-entry and reduced recidivism. We have treated the criminal justice system as a binary choice: law and order vs. programs to help people change. Spoiler alert: they are not mutually exclusive, and in fact are dependent on each other for success. However, the point at which people are prepared and willing to move out of addiction, untreated behavioral health problems, and bad decisions does not always move on a timetable imposed by an institution. Systems should be based on leveraged consequences combined with offramps when people finally choose to resolve to improve and should recognize and reward those choices. Instead, we keep wavering between "lock them all up" and "let them all out with no plan at all." There is good data that the severity of sentencing is not as important as the certainty of being caught.

Moving Forward Together

Now is the time for leaders to move beyond outrage politics and embrace comprehensive solutions to public safety. We need to recognize that the safety of our communities requires both a commitment to address the root causes of crime and ensure that the rule of law is respected and upheld-- for everyone. Effective public safety policies must bridge the gap between communities and law

enforcement. This means fostering a cooperative relationship where both parties are engaged in a dialogue aimed at mutual respect and understanding.

When all is said and done, you can't fix inequities in the criminal justice system by making it easier to commit crime. No matter your political perspective, we need to stop the outrage politics, fueling bad policies, resulting in bad outcomes. People are rightly fed up with brazen criminals and they want more officers, providing good, fair, and transparent policing. Governor-Elect Ferguson has made clear he wants to improve staffing. Let's get it done.

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WASPC was founded in 1963 and represents executive and top management personnel from law enforcement agencies statewide. With more than 900 members it includes the 39 county sheriffs, and 240 police chiefs, as well as the Washington State Patrol, the Washington Department of Corrections, and representatives of several federal agencies.