



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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Greetings from your Executive Director:

Our weekly webinars started recently-- if you would like to sign up [here is the link](#). We sent [this video](#) out last week as well, and here is our [Pre-Session statement](#) regarding our legislative agenda.

A few key points to keep in mind to assist you in communicating some elements of our legislative priorities:

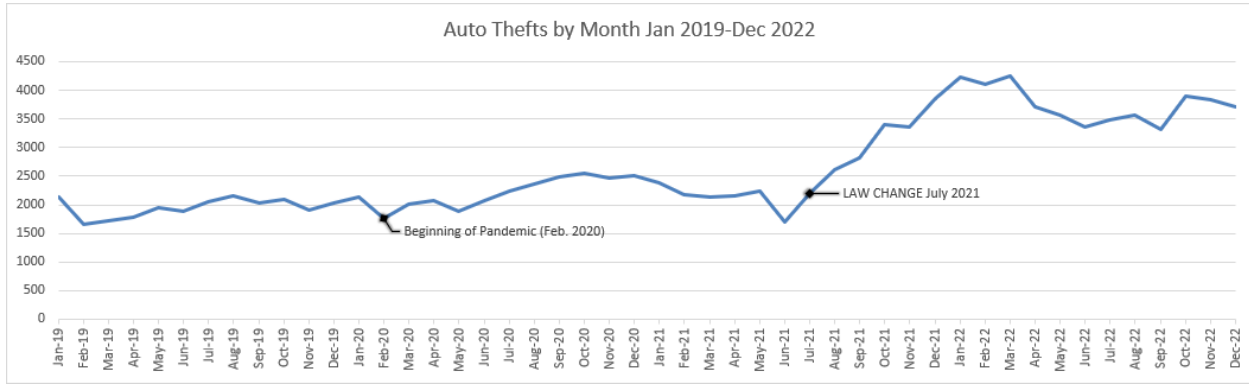
First, for changes to the pursuit law, [Senate Bill 5352](#) and [HB 1363](#) were filed, with strong bipartisan support. This week the Tacoma News Tribune published an [editorial](#) supporting the change, saying "... but two years later, one change — which sets strict limits on when police officers can pursue a suspect — has clearly been a mistake. It's time to fix the error, with lawmakers, advocates and law enforcement setting differences aside and doing what's best for the people of Washington. While parsing crime data is difficult and precise cause-effect conclusions can be dangerous — not to mention fodder for political warfare — the spike in Washington car thefts is illustrative."

The July, 2021 pursuit law change is clearly related to what the [Pierce County Prosecutor](#) recently called "the growing sense of lawlessness in our communities."

Last week I was a guest on KIRO-FM in Seattle regarding pursuits, staffing, and our legislative agenda this year, and [here](#) is the podcast if you are interested- the discussion about objections to changes in the pursuit law may be helpful as you have these discussions. KOMO-TV also [did a story](#) on the topic.

An analysis of data from the Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC) shows a significant increase in auto thefts. In the 18 months prior the law change, which included the effects of the pandemic, the data shows that the average monthly number of vehicle thefts has increased 61% since the law was changed in July of 2021. In the 18 months prior to the law change, there were 39,305 vehicles stolen, for a monthly average of 2183. In the 18 months since the law went into effect, there have been 63,280 vehicles

stolen, for a monthly average of 3515 vehicles stolen per month. In 2022, 45,033 vehicles were stolen in the state, compared to 23,421 in 2019.



Also this year, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission notes that [traffic deaths](#) have reached a 20-year high.

We can, and should, fix the pursuit law to fall in line with Washington State’s duty of care standards and enable appropriate discretion in engaging in police vehicle pursuits. Severe prohibitions on vehicular pursuits need to be reversed. The current proposals in the legislature still provide for strong restrictions on pursuits, and a common-sense balancing test: that the risks of not arresting the suspect outweigh the risk of the pursuit itself. The proposals balance safety and justice for victims, and are consistent with the idea that pursuits should be rare and necessary. That is why the proposals have strong bipartisan support, including 40 co-sponsors in the House. We can’t allow offenders the advantage over victims and to just drive away.

Second, [Senate Bill 5361](#) and [HB 1446](#) were filed, also with bipartisan support. These are the bills that would provide for a sales tax diversion local option to provide additional revenue for law enforcement staffing. It is worth noting that last week, the Governor, the Speaker, and legislative leaders from both parties all mentioned law enforcement staffing as a concern and a major topic for the legislature this year. We sent out [this release](#) reinforcing this bipartisan support for more officers, deputies, troopers and corrections staff. Also, I am providing [this transcript](#) and supplemental information, from a similar bill last year, regarding the benefits of adequate staffing for law enforcement. It may be helpful particularly when communicating with those who have not always supported added staffing.

Also, it is important to note that the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) had previously released their major policy recommendations for this year, and Blake and Pursuits are #1 and #2 on their [agenda](#).

Finally, this week Sen. Jesse Salomon introduced [SB 5467](#), which is the “Blake Bill” fix that many stakeholders, including WASPC, have been working on with the Senator and many others. It is a decent balance of consequences for illegal drug possession, treatment access and focus, and ensuring lab tests can be obtained before the statute of limitations runs out. It is designed to provide for a meaningful criminal consequence for those who refuse treatment or help, but also making sure there are resources for those who do want help. We expect this will be a “starting point” for future legislative considerations as the session progresses. We do support this bill and will stay engaged in this as it moves forward, and other proposals are also made. [Here](#) is a news story based on the Senator’s press release. In discussions with people about this bill and the decisions to be made, I sometimes say that what we are doing is clearly not working, and this is not a choice between the “Drug War” and decriminalization. The bill is a balance that, in many ways helps to end the Drug War in the right way, by making the criminal justice system a component to incentivize rather than the only option. It also returns a meaningful criminal consequence for those who choose not to accept treatment.

Thank you all again for your continued engagement and assistance!

Stay Safe- Steve

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