



Washington Association of  
**SHERIFFS &  
POLICE CHIEFS**

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**September 6, 2024**

**Greetings from your Executive Director:**

As we head into September, here are a few updates—

Office of Independent Investigations

First, the WA Office of Independent Investigations (OII) has notified Region 1 (Western Washington, from Clark Co. up to Clallam Co.) that it intends to start the process of potentially investigating uses of deadly force involving law enforcement starting December 1. WASPC has been committed to providing every avenue to ensure OII and our Sheriffs and Chiefs get the information and feedback everyone needs as this moves forward. Our Board set up an Ad Hoc OII/IIT Committee (co-chaired by Mt. Vernon Chief Dan Christman and Clark County Sheriff John Horch) to monitor and address concerns to the extent we are able.

The law that created OII, like most of the “police reform” bills that were hastily and unilaterally written in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, left a lot of questions unanswered and did not provide much direction. Gov. Inslee appointed former King County Judge and prosecutor Roger Rogoff as the charter Director, and Director Rogoff has been diligent in understanding the challenges in building the team from the ground up, and has been very transparent and communicative with both law enforcement and community groups. He has built some good relationships and he and his team have been present at both WASPC conferences and regular meetings of IIT (Independent Investigative Team) commanders around the state to answer concerns and questions.

As OII heads toward their Dec. 1 date to begin possibly taking individual cases in Region 1, there continue to be a number of questions about logistics and exactly how the process will go in real situations. There is concern that as IIT teams and other law enforcement personnel will be asked to provide some level of assistance to the OII team, due to limitations of their position, and their resource limitations, there may be confusion and liability, and this could place those personnel at risk of being accused of interfering, or somehow maliciously being involved in what is supposed to be an independent process. At the same time, teams understand that everyone involved wants to work for the best outcomes for transparency, public trust and ensuring objectivity.

To help OII and our state’s Sheriffs and Chiefs better understand and work within these concerns, the committee and WASPC are doing two things:

1. Scheduling two separate panels at the Fall conference in Tri-Cities which will request OII staff to be present to address these concerns and take questions (the OII staff will also be present for the entire conference for individual questions and concerns from members);
2. Chief Christman has provided the attached (OII Questions) list of questions and concerns that had been developed by the working group to ask OII for some written responses. They are attached for your information. These don’t provide a complete resolution but are intended to get you the most current information to address valid concerns regarding roles, liability, and potential accusations of teams being

involved in tasks or other elements of the investigations that members of the public or advocacy groups criticize.

So- we will keep you all in the loop and on behalf of Sheriff Horch and Chief Christman, thank you for your continued interest and we look forward to helping get the best answers.

### Fall Conference

Here are a few highlights as you consider whether to attend our fall conference in Kennewick:

1. Oil Panels
2. Committee meetings
3. A Conversation on leadership with Marine Gen. James Mattis (ret.), former U.S. Defense Secretary (we also intend to have an opportunity for member photos with Gen. Mattis)
4. We have invited the two candidates for our next Attorney General, Pete Serrano and Nick Brown, to attend depending on who is elected in November. Both have agreed, so we will have the Attorney General-elect for discussion, questions, and to allow WASPC members to meet whoever is elected
5. Our main training session will feature Julie Parker and Chief Chris Mannino (ret.), to present on Crisis Communication and how to handle communications for intense and high-profile incidents, as well as developing ongoing effective communication for your agency.
6. Ongoing jail track training coordinated by Ric Bishop

I posted the following two items on LinkedIn but am sharing in the newsletter for those of you who do not receive that communication from me:

First, you will often see articles and media coverage of issues related to law enforcement where they will say a particular racial or other demographic group is “overrepresented” or “disproportionately impacted” by arrests, or use of force, or any other factor. It frequently implies that the police and/or the system must be racist because of these differences.

Look at what they are using as their “denominator”, or the baseline against which they are comparing data to make their argument. In almost all cases where the media, or even a researcher, wants to create a particular narrative, they will use census data of the population. If a group is 5% of the population but they are 20% of arrests, let’s say, that must mean they are four times more likely to be arrested, and that shows bias, or discrimination, or racism, or some other nefarious intent.

Here’s the problem: population, or census based, denominators have been pretty much entirely debunked by researchers, and have been for a long time.

Examples: “...However, using Census data as a benchmark is inherently misleading because it does not appropriately consider those who do not drive, those in the driving population who are not residents, or variations in driving behavior.” [Journal of Criminal Justice and Law](#),

Here is [another](#): “...by the late 1990s, the use of census data largely had been discredited as a benchmark measure for profiling research conducted in urban areas.” Dept. of Justice,

And [another](#): “We argue that this assumption has led to a misdiagnosis of the problem, and by extension, solutions that won’t work.”

There is no agreed-upon alternative to most effectively measure real bias or discrimination in a system, but most researchers have suggested using calls for service, victim data, or other measures that factor in the number of actual incidents and behavior involved in the police activity- in other words what was the context and why were the police involved in the first place? I don’t offer this simply to “defend” police, but to point out the more insidious problem with this, frankly, lazy and misleading use of data: that when there are actual disproportionate impacts that are due to discrimination or institutional biases, this method masks those more important data. When you read articles about this issue, pay attention to how they are using data--real decisions and real policies flow too often from opinions that are formed by misleading and discredited information. Public safety is too important.

Second, Seattle Times columnist Danny Westneat points out [Seattle seems to be accepting a new normal of higher gun violence | The Seattle Times](#) that shootings in parts of our state are increasing while declining elsewhere, and people seem to be resigned to it. He points out that enforcement and incarceration need to be part of an overall solution, writing "How do you achieve gun control without more police out there doing more aggressive police work? ...that would probably mean more cops doing far more searches and seizures. And more prison-level punishments."

Most people already know that our state is last in the nation in police staffing, but in terms of "prison-level punishments" to reduce violent crime, here are some data points you need to know.

In the last six years, from 2018-2024:

- The population of the state has grown 8% (7.4 mil to 8.0 mil), while
- The capacity of our state prison system has decreased by 8% as the state has chosen to shut down existing units and wings of facilities
- The population of persons held in state prisons has gone down 25% (17,274 in 2018 to 13,001 in July 2024)
- 85% of those held in state prison are there for violent crimes (murder, sex crimes, robbery, and assault)

Source: [Data Analytics | Washington State Department of Corrections](#)

Our state has quietly but significantly reduced prison population by 25% while the state has grown 8%. Commissions created by the legislature continue to advocate for reduced sentences and new ways to release those already held, and I expect that will continue. Be aware of these data as our state considers how to best address this unacceptable trend.

Finally this week, Anacortes Chief Dave Floyd sent us [this](#) news story from Fox 13 Seattle about how social media may be discouraging young persons from what they call “hero jobs”, such as nurse, firefighter, and law enforcement. It’s worth taking a look and it certainly causes me to think about how your agency may be reaching out to people watching a lot of social media that may be sending that message. At the same time, there also seems to be a lot of indication that younger people want to serve in meaningful roles that make a difference in our lives- I don’t think these two things are mutually exclusive, but it does speak to the challenge we have in recruiting and communication.

Thanks for all you do and stay safe! Steve