



# WASHINGTON STATE SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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March 11, 2026

The Honorable Bob Ferguson  
Governor of Washington  
Office of the Governor  
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Limited Veto Request — SB 5974 (Sheriff Qualifications / Decertification and Vacancy)

Governor Ferguson:

The Washington State Sheriffs' Association respectfully requests that you veto only Sections 9, 11, 12, and 13 of SB 5974. Together, they replace sheriffs' accountability to voters with administrative removal, voiding the voters' final authority over an elected constitutional office.

Washington's sheriffs support meaningful accountability for everyone entrusted with enforcing Washington's laws, including ourselves. Sheriffs are public servants, bound by the rule of law, subject to the courts, and accountable to the voters. The central issue raised by SB 5974 is not whether sheriffs should be accountable—of course we should. The question is who has final authority to remove an elected sheriff from office.

As passed, SB 5974 would allow a state-level decertification outcome to vacate the office of sheriff, triggering replacement through appointment rather than a direct decision of the voters who elected that sheriff. Sections 9 and 13 create an absolute requirement that a sheriff obtain and maintain CJTC certification to hold and remain in office. Sections 11 and 12 create a mechanism for non-electoral vacancy and appointment. Together, these provisions use a professional certification process—designed to regulate a profession—to override and displace voter choice.

This is not routine legislative housekeeping. It is a fundamental change in the balance between administrative oversight and democratic governance.

Washington's Constitution begins with a clear and foundational principle: all political power is inherent in the people. When removal from an elected office is

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at issue, our traditions and constitutional design presume that the final decision rests with the people who conferred that authority in the first place. SB 5974 shifts decisive authority away from voters and into an administrative process.

Supporters of SB 5974 have pointed to attorney and judicial discipline as precedent for non-electoral removal. But those precedents actually underscore why the Legislature should not make this change through ordinary statute. The prosecuting attorney's requirement to remain a licensed attorney predates statehood and is reflected in territorial-era law. Washington's modern system for judicial discipline and removal was established by constitutional amendment adopted by voters in 1980, with the Washington Supreme Court serving as the final decision-maker. In other words, when Washington has altered foundational accountability structures for constitutional officers, it has historically done so through constitutional design and amendment—not through ordinary legislation that makes an appointed body the decisive step in vacating an elected office or nullifying voters' choices.

Washington's sheriffs recognize that SB 5974 contains other policy provisions on which reasonable people will disagree, including provisions related to qualifications, volunteers, and the scope of discretion necessary for local prioritization. Sheriffs believe some of those provisions would benefit from further refinement to improve public safety and avoid unintended consequences. But those debates are not the reason for this letter. Our request is narrowly focused on preserving voter rights and constitutional norms. Sections 9, 11, 12, and 13 are the portions of SB 5974 that, in combination, preempt the electorate's authority over removal of an elected sheriff. They are severable from the remainder of the act, and their removal would not render other provisions inoperable or unintelligible.

There are other ways to improve democratic accountability for sheriffs. WSSA and WASPC supported such an alternative approach in HB 2387. That proposal would have used the state certification process for what it does well—investigation, due process, and formal findings—and would have allowed a sheriff's decertification to initiate recall proceedings, so voters of the affected county could make the final decision. That approach did not advance. But the principle remains sound: if the concern is that voters lack clear information or a direct mechanism to hold a sheriff accountable, the answer is to equip them with formal findings and a clear democratic pathway—not to bypass the electorate.

Sheriffs are accountable to their communities—not only for upright conduct, but for priorities: how to allocate scarce time and resources and how to reflect local needs in lawful practice. That is the purpose of local election and local accountability for this office. And when removal from this office is at issue, democratic legitimacy requires that the voters remain the final decision-makers.

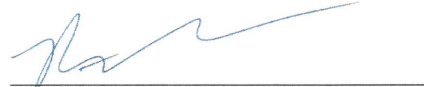
For these reasons, Washington’s sheriffs respectfully ask that you veto Sections 9, 11, 12, and 13 of SB 5974, and—if you choose—approve the remainder. This tailored and limited veto would preserve the authority of voters and our state’s constitutional norms.

Washington’s sheriffs remain ready to work in good faith with your office and the Legislature on reforms to improve accountability and public safety while safeguarding the rights of Washington voters. We recognize that the veto we are requesting includes significant features of the bill, including background checks and candidate qualification provisions. Sheriffs are not seeking to evade those issues. We are asking that any such reforms be pursued in a manner that does not convert certification into a substitute for the voters’ authority over an elected constitutional office. We stand ready to participate in that work, promptly and in good faith.

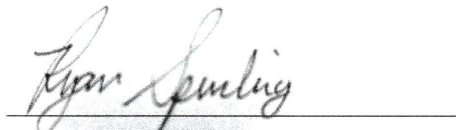
Respectfully,



Sheriff Mark Crider  
WSSA President  
Walla Walls County



Sheriff Brad Manke  
WSSA Vice President  
Stevens County



Sheriff Ryan Spurling  
WSSA Secretary/Treasurer  
Mason County



Sheriff Clay Myers  
WSSA Past President  
Kittitas County

cc: Members, Washington State Legislature