



Washington Association of
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**STATEMENT OF WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
PRAISE SUPREME COURT DECISION TO DENY PRISONER RELEASE**

Public safety and respect for victims were given due recognition today as the Washington State Supreme Court denied a petition from inmates and advocates to release prisoners in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A sudden mass release would have increased the number of new crimes committed, creating public safety concerns. Washington has a case-by-case release system to reduce inmate populations in response to COVID-19 and it should be maintained in support of public safety.

Law enforcement opposed the release of prisoners. It would have increased public safety concerns, exacerbated the trauma victims endured originally and potentially lead to avoidable new victimization, creating public safety concerns. Prematurely opening the prison door for an inmate should not also reopen the deep distress of witnesses and victims.

As an alternative to the wholesale mass release, effective solutions to reduce the inmate population have already been implemented to protect inmates from COVID-19. The mass release requested by Petitioners was excessive, overreaching, and without a statutory basis. We are grateful the court agreed.

Law enforcement availability is stretched during the Stay at Home order. Many in law enforcement are on the front lines and those first exposed to members of the public despite the COVID-19 risks. With all of these added pressures on law enforcement it is simply not in the best interests of public safety for the mass release of offenders.

Local and state officials should be allowed to continue crafting policies based on the circumstances in each county or judicial district to provide individualized responses to COVID-19 that maintain public safety while reducing the inmate population.