



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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The current public health crisis, and the economic and personal disruptions in our lives, has been unprecedented. Too many are trying to use law enforcement as a political wedge. From the beginning, law enforcement has been consistent and clear. This unusual situation calls for a different approach, and we have focused on education and engagement. Well over two months after the crisis started, there have been, to our knowledge, no physical arrests or even a citation issued for violation of the order in our state. Washington's Sheriffs and Chiefs are accountable to our communities, and continue to work to balance health risks and economic impacts, just like everyone else. Right now, we all need to give each other some grace at this challenging time.

Understandably, some are frustrated by people violating and not having a consequence, while others are frustrated by the order and its disruptions. Scan social media, or check any cable news channel, and you will see click-worthy coverage filled with outrageous and loaded language. It seems everyone must be divided into one of two camps: you are either a selfish science-denying profit-seeking ignoramus who wants everyone to die, or a selfish lemming who does not care about personal liberty and wants all businesses to fail. There is little coverage of the majority who have a balanced view. Most of us fully acknowledge this is a serious health crisis, we have significantly changed our behaviors and practices, and we want a careful and safe re-open of the economy. The focus on outrage and creating dueling narratives is not serving our law enforcement officers and is missing the reality of what we do to ensure public trust and safety.

Law enforcement across this state has consistently emphasized respect for personal liberties and the difficult circumstances created by this crisis. Domestic abuse calls have increased and law enforcement responds and handles these calls while placing themselves at risk.

- In Bremerton, a 911 caller reported a woman pleading for her life in an apartment. The 23-year-old officer responded, heard the woman inside the door, and kicked it in when no one would answer. He found a man in the act of repeatedly stabbing the woman. When he ordered him to stop, the man threw his knife at the officer, who ducked and took the man safely into custody. The officer stopped an attempted murder and saved a life; the woman was airlifted with critical injuries.
- Vancouver Police set up a program to deliver needed medications to those who cannot get out.
- Last week, the Grant County Sheriff's Office continued to go the extra mile to communicate with the non-English speaking residents of their community, on how to stay safe and making sure they felt comfortable working and travelling for those who are essential workers.

Meanwhile, officer and deputies continue to respond to 911 calls and handle emergencies, often involving persons who definitely do not socially distance.

You likely did not read about any of this. It does not get clicks, it does not become viral, and it does not serve one of the dueling “outrage” narratives. Law enforcement trusts the public and our communities – we know people are aware of the serious nature of this health threat, the need to ensure personal liberties and support a deliberate and planned reopening of the economy. Most people know we need to strike a balance, and it is a challenge. Your local law enforcement is accountable to you. You elect the Mayors and Councils who select your Police Chief, and you directly elect your County Sheriff. We are your partners in working through this unprecedented time as we move forward. We invite you to pay less attention to the extremes and those seeking “clicks”, and more attention to the majority of us working for a reasonable and safe balance. It is our honor to serve you.