



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
STATEMENT ON HB1499**

Past President
Sheriff John Snaza
Thurston County

(Lacey, WA) – The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) supports a robust wrap around system for those with serious substance abuse issues, untreated mental and behavioral health problems. We would actively support HB1499 if the provisions legalizing the possession of controlled substances were removed.

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We have long actively supported, and continue to ask for, better community investments and system improvements to assist those with substance use disorder; but such efforts should not be at the expense of public safety. We encourage the legislature to focus these efforts on what we should do to address the problem, rather than what we should stop doing.

The criminal justice system is not an appropriate or effective strategy to broadly address those with substance use disorder and should not be the most accessible path toward treatment. However, the criminal justice system has proven to be the only effective mechanism to intervene and treat many with substance use disorder. Our collective efforts should be focused to create additional community resources for intervention and treatment, rather than eliminating one of the few mechanisms that has shown to be effective in some cases.

HB 1499 does not just decriminalize possession of illicit substances such as heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and unprescribed scheduled drugs such as OxyContin and oxycodone; HB 1499 makes the possession of such controlled substances legal to all persons, including children.

WASPC asks the legislature to remove the provisions of HB 1499 that legalize the possession of controlled substances and enact the provisions that create investments in community programs that offer opportunities for intervention and treatment for those with substance use disorders. In other words, support should be provided to those that need support.

Washington's Sheriffs and Police Chiefs have witnessed first-hand the devastation that substance use disorder brings to the lives of those who suffer from these drugs, as well as the devastation to their loved ones and communities. Drug use is not a victimless crime. We cannot remain silent on a proposal that we feel would enable

Serving the Law Enforcement Community and the Citizens of Washington

this continued victimization.

WASPC has been at the forefront of efforts to assist those whose criminal behavior is driven by substance use disorder, including administering programs that offer opportunities to avoid arrest and/or jail in favor of treatment or other support services. The Arrest and Jail Alternatives grant program is an example of this type of behavioral service program that deserves more support while the infrastructure of a robust and comprehensive statewide behavior health support system is established.

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About WASPC:

WASPC was founded in 1963 and consists of executive and top management personnel from law enforcement agencies statewide. With more than 900 members it includes the 39 elected county sheriffs, and 240 police chiefs, as well as the Washington State Patrol, the Washington Department of Corrections, and representatives of Tribal and federal agencies.

WASPC is the only association of its kind in the nation combining representatives from local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement into a single body, working toward a common goal. WASPC's function is to provide specific materials and services to all law enforcement agencies in the state, members, and non-members alike.

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