

FOR RELEASE
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Statement attribution:
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**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
STATEMENT ON POLICE REFORM PROPOSALS**

(Lacey, WA) – The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) today reaffirmed its commitment to police reform measures that focus on increasing public trust, protecting victims, and improving public safety. We want to build on our record of supporting programs that, when appropriate, divert people away from the criminal justice system and toward behavioral health, mental health, and addiction services. As the Washington Legislature nears the halfway point of its 2021 session, WASPC is urging lawmakers to support measures that ensure the right balance of reforms with good policing.

The recent state Supreme Court ruling that renders the law regarding possession of controlled substances (*State v Blake*) unconstitutional is a significant and far-reaching change. We are concerned the ruling will affect drug diversion programs that courts have used to direct people into treatment services rather than into the criminal justice system. Diversion is not entirely reliant on a criminal charge, but charges can be part of the solution. When combined with the Washington Legislature's proposals for extensive changes to policing, sentencing, and liability for officers, we expect removal of the possibility for charges will have real and substantial implications for public safety in our communities. While accountability and responding to community concerns is important, we also need to reinforce and support the good work of the men and women of law enforcement who reach out and get people help. Police reform and good policing cannot be, and should not be, mutually exclusive.

As the legislature starts to consider the next biennial budget we ask them to ensure support for robust programs that help get people into treatment and support, and enhance public safety in our communities. Drug courts, mental health courts, and programs administered by WASPC including [Mental Health Field Response](#), and [Arrest and Jail Alternatives Program](#) are examples of solutions that work. There are short videos in each of the links about these programs.

Community expectations are urgent, and we need to provide outcomes that balance reform and public safety. These are conversations and changes that cannot wait, and it is our collective responsibility to get it right. We will work to bring communities together and continue to be committed to the best possible outcomes, while acknowledging differences.

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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.