



Washington Association of
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**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
2023 PRE-SESSION STATEMENT**

WASPC URGES OUR LEGISLATORS TO FOCUS ON JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS AND BALANCE IN REFORMS

(Lacey, WA) --- As the 2023 Washington State legislative session begins on January 9, the [Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs \(WASPC\)](#) will work for nonpartisan, constructive reform, and measures to improve public trust and protect victims.

We believe in balanced public safety laws that support the core functions of government in an environment where the men and women of law enforcement reflect and care for their communities while having the tools to care for victims in their pursuit of justice. A recent statewide poll shows that public safety is the second highest concern after the economy ([Crosscut](#)).

We encourage bipartisan cooperation to enact laws that protect our communities and get people the help they need. Crime is rising, more people are being victimized, and there are not enough resources available to those in need.

Here are our legislative priorities to improve public safety and provide justice for victims:

Drug laws

- The effects of the Washington Supreme Court Blake decision and legislative changes to our drug laws tolerated personal drug possession and made harmful and dangerous drugs essentially legal to possess across the State. The legislative response to the Blake decision has made it far easier for those who sell drugs to prey on victims and has brought chaos to public spaces. Drug related crime, such as retail theft, has increased greatly. We support policies that provide incentives to encourage drug rehabilitation and treatment while holding those who are in unlawful possession of drugs accountable in a compassionate manner. We must break the cycle of drug abuse, provide help to individuals in need, and take back our public spaces for our community and our businesses. Behavioral and mental health services need to be strengthened with resources to hire more people who can address this crisis.

Pursuits

- Law enforcement will be the first to recognize that car chase pursuits can be dangerous. Recent polices restricting pursuits made driving a car a "get out of jail free" card and creates conditions

that empower criminals, jeopardize public safety, and diminishes the rule of law in Washington. We can fix the pursuit law to fall in line with Washington State's duty of care standards and enable more discretion in engaging in police vehicle pursuits in a manner that offers a balance between the risk of the pursuit versus the reasons(s) for the pursuit. Severe prohibitions on vehicular pursuits need to be reversed. When NOT arresting the suspect outweighs the risk of the pursuit, officers need the option to pursue criminals to ensure public safety. We can't allow offenders the advantage over victims and to just drive away.

Recruitment and Retention

- For more than a dozen years, Washington has had the fewest law enforcement officers per capita, ranking 51st in the nation. In 2021, that ratio declined even further. We need to act quickly to catch up with the growth of our region. Today, our State has 500 fewer officers than it did a year ago. That affects prevention and response time to 9-1-1 calls and increases stress on our remaining police officers. De-escalation, proactive policing, and supervision require resources to "team up and slow down." Every community deserves a public safety agency that is well-trained, well-equipped, and well-staffed to deliver the best public service. Our communities need funds to recruit and retain additional officers. We support effective solutions that will provide local governments with more resources for criminal justice services in ways that won't raise existing taxes.

Juvenile Justice

- Kids should have a choice. By removing a parent's choice to allow their children to talk to the police and removing a juvenile's choice, the current laws are preventing both from fully taking advantage of circumstances where law enforcement is trying to help. These laws prevent juveniles from talking about an investigation with law enforcement officers, taking away opportunities to declare their innocence or offer helpful information to an investigation. In some cases, these laws have led to more youth being charged with crimes, sometimes tragic outcomes. The current laws direct with whom juveniles can speak without including the choice of them or their parents. This creates an unfortunate outcome with more law enforcement cases filed, increasing the number of juveniles in the criminal justice system. Positive intervention between our communities' kids and law enforcement is a good, healthy, and helpful tool to reduce crime.

Public safety laws should support balanced outcomes and help victims of crime, support law enforcement, and hold offenders accountable. Crime doesn't know politics and public safety should not be a partisan issue.

Moving forward together, we can refine Washington laws to improve trust, accountability, and transparency. We can bring our communities together and promote the safety of all Washingtonians.

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