



February 10, 2023

Statements attributed to
Steven D. Strachan, executive director

WASPC update: Pursuits - Homicides, Traffic Deaths and Auto Theft compared to nationwide trends

A bill currently being proposed in the legislature calls for a 1 to 2-year study of police pursuits followed by the development of a model policy, with no change to current pursuit laws. **Public safety is not an experiment to be studied; it is a core responsibility of our elected officials.** Our communities cannot wait for years for change. Compelling data from multiple sources reveal that homicides, traffic deaths and auto thefts in Washington State are all higher than overall national trends.

The debate over crime statistics and data regarding the risks associated with vehicle pursuits has detracted from an important issue the legislature must address in this session – many more people are fleeing from lawful traffic stops, because they know they can. People see with their own eyes the drastic changes in their communities, the increased lawlessness, criminals acting with impunity, and lawbreakers with an upper hand adding to everyday risk for all Washingtonians. The need to fix the pursuit law to provide a more balanced approach is clear—and to assert that the massive increases in drivers fleeing from police is not related to the pursuit restrictions enacted by the 2021 Legislature defies logic and common sense. Washingtonians need bipartisan leadership, not delays.

Last week the pursuit restrictions enacted by the Washington Legislature, resulted in the Richland Police Department's (RPD) difficult decision to not pursue a deadly shooting suspect. RPD had probable cause for felon in possession of a firearm but did not have probable cause for murder, only the lesser standard of reasonable suspicion. The determination by RPD has been confirmed by Retired Benton County Prosecutor Andy Miller, who said, "Based on the information provided by the Richland Police Department, a pursuit under those circumstances would not have been lawful. The decision to not pursue was the only lawful choice."

Some have made statements that increases in homicides, traffic deaths, auto thefts, and others are simply part of larger nationwide trends, with no relationship to law changes in this state. Here is the comparison:

	Washington State	Nationwide
Homicides, 2022 (Preliminary)	+7%	-4%
Homicides, 2019-2022	+73%	+34%
Traffic Deaths, 2021-2022	+11%	-.02%
Auto Theft, 2019-2022	+92%	+59%

We agree with the summary of an [editorial in the Vancouver Columbian](#):

Taking decisions away from police officers in vehicle pursuits hasn't worked. Returning a limited measure of discretion to law enforcement will send a message to criminals that they do not hold all the power, to police officers that we expect them to use good judgment, and to their supervisors to apply leadership, training, and accountability.

Sources:

[Washington Traffic Deaths Reach 20-Year High - Washington Traffic Safety Commission](#)
[Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2022 Update - Council on Criminal Justice \(counciloncj.org\)](#)
[U.S. Saw Continuing Drop in Murders in 2022 - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)
[NHTSA Estimates: Traffic Deaths Third Quarter of 2022 | NHTSA](#)
[Traffic deaths in WA outpaced national toll in 2022, early data shows | The Seattle Times](#)
[Data Charts - Driving.pdf \(memberclicks.net\)](#)

Preliminary WASPC Homicide Reporting, Feb. 9, 2023