



Washington Association of
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**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
2024 PRE-SESSION STATEMENT**

WASPC URGES LEGISLATORS TO FOCUS ON JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS & RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

(Lacey, WA) --- Washington State's legislative session begins on January 8, 2024. The [Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs \(WASPC\)](#) will work for nonpartisan, constructive public safety policies, and measures to improve public trust and protect victims. Public safety is a core function of government, is required for communities and businesses to thrive, and should not be a partisan issue.

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.

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 to deter, intervene, and investigate crimes to reduce victimizations, and to get people to the resources they need.

Here are our [2024 legislative priorities](#) to improve public safety and provide justice for victims:

Recruitment and Retention

For more than a dozen years, Washington has had the fewest law enforcement officers per capita, ranking 51st in the nation and since 2019 that ratio declined even further. We need to act quickly to begin to catch up with the growth of our region. Understaffed and under resourced law enforcement agencies affect crime prevention, response time to 911 calls, and increases stress on our remaining police officers. De-escalation, proactive policing, and appropriate 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. We support effective solutions to provide local governments with more resources for criminal justice services.

Juvenile Justice

Current laws require attorney's permission before officers can speak with juveniles and that prevents youth, parents, and guardians from fully recognizing circumstances where law enforcement is present and able to help. Attorneys counsel against such conversations in all but the rarest of cases which prevent juveniles from talking about an investigation with law enforcement

officers. It takes away opportunities for youth to declare their innocence, offer helpful information about other suspects or evidence related to an investigation, and receive timely crisis-oriented aid. In some cases, these laws have actually led to more youth being charged with crimes when officers have probable cause and no other options to talk with the young suspect. This unintended consequence has led to some tragic outcomes in jurisdictions across the state. Due to the law's direction on when and to whom a juvenile may speak, without acknowledging a juvenile's consent or desire for parental involvement, young people are being left with their rights hindered.. Positive intervention between youth and law enforcement is a good, healthy, and helpful tool to reduce crime.

Pursuits

Law enforcement recognizes vehicle pursuits can be dangerous. In recent years, overly broad policies restricting pursuits made driving a car a "get out of jail free" card and created conditions that empower criminals, jeopardize public safety, and diminish the rule of law in Washington. In 2023, the Legislature made a few adjustments but the result is a minimal reduction in pursuits but an exponential increase of the number vehicles that flee. When NOT arresting the suspect outweighs the risk of the pursuit, officers need the option to pursue criminals to ensure public safety. In addition, as new technologies becomes available for law enforcement as pursuit alternatives, funding, and resources for agencies to use and maintain such equipment is necessary. Traffic cameras, rapid DNA analysis, regional crime labs, and other alternative technologies will empower law enforcement to apprehend suspects who flee in a safe manner at a later time and we need the legislature to invest in such alternatives. We can't allow offenders the advantage over victims and to just drive away.

Public safety laws should support balanced outcomes and help victims of crime, support law enforcement, and hold offenders accountable and reduce crime. 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.