



Washington Association of

SHERIFFS & POLICE CHIEFS

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October 14, 2026

Greetings from Your Executive Director:

As we head into fall here are a few updates:

WASPC Fall Conference

Our fall conference is Nov 9-12 in Spokane. Our full draft conference agenda is [here](#), and the registration is found [here](#). Of special note: on Monday, Nov. 9 (which is usually the day people are starting to arrive, and we schedule a few sessions) we have added a “bonus” from 9:00 AM to 3:00 called “[Retire Well](#)” which is not just about retirement. This course goes beyond traditional retirement preparation and addresses the whole person—not just financial readiness. Designed for public safety professionals approaching or considering retirement, the course provides tools to rediscover identity, passion, and purpose while fostering a strong sense of stability and fulfillment. Even if your retirement is far away these are good topics to cover and help get you in a place where we all thrive pre- and post-retirement. A lot of attendees have already signed up and please consider adding this to your calendar as well!

In addition to committee meetings, Kim Bliss from the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) will discuss and answer questions about decertification, and we will also have a presentation on approaches to homelessness and using data. Bellingham Chief Mertzig will facilitate a panel on Women in Command, Redmond Chief Darrell Lowe will present on AI-Ready Leadership, and we will hear from Seattle Metro Chamber President Joe Nguyen on how to work for good public safety policy in the current political environment. Finally, we will welcome Gordon Graham back to update us on risk management and leadership. We hope to see you there!

Employment Agreements

For some time, I have been trying to figure out a more comprehensive way to answer the question I am often asked about employment agreements and what a new Chief might need when they become or are hired as a Chief. Here is one resource for you if (and when) that happens. Our legal counsel, Mike McAleenan, has provided a draft Chief’s [employment agreement](#) which provides a basic draft overview, or at least a starting point, for you if you choose to use it. It definitely does not replace a review by your counsel or attorney (and again, we are not your attorney and this is not legal advice, it’s just a resource) but it may provide a place to start for you, including clauses about “for cause” and compensation if a Mayor or City Council choose to make a change. Many thanks to Mike for getting us something to get us started! Questions? Let me know.

WATPA

This week we welcome Jeff Carroll to the WASPC Team. Jeff will serve as the [Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority](#) (WATPA) Program Specialist. Jeff comes to us following his retirement from the Lakewood Police Department in 2025. Jeff has over 32 years of law enforcement experience. Jeff supervised the Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force (PSATT), a multi-agency regional task force serving

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law enforcement partners throughout Pierce and King Counties from 2019-2025. Jeff is familiar with WATPA and is jumping right into his new role. We are very glad to have Jeff as part of our team!

Firearms

Some of you have had questions about recent changes to firearms training and concealed carry laws, and particularly about the term “sponsor” for training and whether your agency should/could “sponsor” required training for civilians. Here is a quick overview of what we have determined:

The Legislature has recently enacted significant changes to both the concealed pistol license process and the new permit-to-purchase firearms program. Both programs require classroom and live-fire training that must be “sponsored” by one of the entities listed in Section 3 of RCW 9.41.1132, which includes county and municipal law enforcement agencies. The sponsorship requirement is not new, but proof of how it is delivered has changed.

A central challenge is that the term *sponsored* is not specifically defined in RCW 9.41.1132 or elsewhere in Washington law. This lack of definition creates substantial uncertainty regarding the scope of a sponsoring agency’s responsibilities and potential legal exposure. When the Washington State Patrol Firearms Division was asked for guidance, they could not provide it and suggested it may require a formal request for an Attorney General’s Opinion through a legislator or prosecutor, or for agencies to seek answers from their own legal counsel.

We subsequently sought input from a group of legal advisors regarding the meaning of “sponsored” under RCW 9.41.1132. It was noted that the ordinary meaning of sponsorship suggests assuming responsibility for, organizing, facilitating, or otherwise standing behind an activity or event. However, without statutory guidance, the precise legal obligations associated with sponsorship remain unclear.

Some have suggested that this ambiguity may be purposeful. By leaving the term undefined, the Legislature may have effectively shifted questions regarding responsibility and liability to the courts. As a result, the ultimate contours of sponsorship, including whether it creates duties or liability beyond merely authorizing a training program, may be determined through future litigation and case law.

This uncertainty is particularly significant because local law enforcement agencies are not required to provide or sponsor these training programs. Agencies may reasonably question whether sponsorship could expose them to claims arising from classroom instruction, range activities, or the later conduct of individuals who successfully complete the training. Although it is not possible to predict how courts will ultimately address such claims, the absence of clear statutory limits creates risk that may not be fully understood until the issue is litigated.

Ultimately, each agency must make its own determination based on its risk tolerance and legal advice. However, WASPC believes the undefined nature of the sponsorship requirement, coupled with the potential for future liability and litigation, provides substantial cause for concern before local law enforcement agencies agree to sponsor these classes. We understand the issue and the bills themselves are being litigated by Second Amendment groups as well.

SB 5974/Qualifications

Recently, Thurston County Superior Court Judge Schaller [ruled](#) that many portions of SB 5974 are unconstitutional. The hearing and ruling came from two separate civil lawsuits filed by Sheriff candidates

regarding barriers to running, and a separate suit filed by Spokane Co. Sheriff Nowels, Ferry Co. Sheriff Maycumber, Pend Oreille Co. Sheriff Blakeslee and Stevens Co. Sheriff Manke. Notably, the ruling addressed many of the same issues raised by the Washington State Sheriffs Association and WASPC, specifically creating special requirements for sheriff candidates that do not apply to other elected officials, making sheriffs the only elected officials who can be removed from office by a non-elected panel, reinforcing that political speech, even when controversial or unpopular, is protected by the First Amendment, and that removing an elected official for their speech through a panel rather than the electoral process is unconstitutional.

Many of our Sheriffs have been communicating these concerns as defined in a [column](#) from March of this year, and many thanks to Sheriffs Nowels, Maycumber, Blakeslee and Manke for their leadership, as well as Spokane County Prosecutor Preston McCollam. The State, through the Attorney General, has indicated they will appeal, so this is not over. If you want to track the case and related schedules and documents use this case information: 26-2-02486-34 | SPOKANE COUNTY SHERIFF JOHN NOWELS et al vs STATE OF WASHINGTON et al. The document containing the actual ruling is supposed to be published Oct. 23, and we'll send that out once we get it.

Following the hearing, Mason Co. Sheriff Ryan Spurling appeared on KIRO Radoi's Gee and Ursula and did a great job representing the issues and the Office of Sheriff.

Jail Standards

At our most recent WASPC board retreat, we discussed the issue of the need for tort reform, the sustainability of local government services in the face of spiraling [civil lawsuits](#), and the ongoing need for basic jail standards. The Corrections Committee at the fall meeting will be considering recommending that the board and WASPC move forward with developing and implementing voluntary statewide jail standards, with a compliance process. This is built on a model used by our neighboring states where Oregon and Idaho do basic inspections each year. The legislature will likely start considering some levels of liability protections in the next session or two and a more comprehensive system would work to provide better and more supportive policy response to these changes. This is still a work in progress but the time has come for us to start to get ahead of this changing environment and we will update you at the conference and as we move forward.

On the topic of jails and civil lawsuits, there was an [opinion published today](#) by the WA Court of Appeals (Div 3) in the lawsuit against Grant county (Anderson, et al v. Joe Kriete, et al). We understand this is the case brought by the estate of a person who was incarcerated in the Grant County Jail and voluntarily consumed heroin while incarcerated and died as a result of it. The estate of the deceased person sued Grant County on a negligence claim. The County tried to dismiss the lawsuit under the felony defense rule (RCW 4.24.420) but the trial court and the Court of Appeals denied Grant County's motion, ruling that the County could not assert the felony defense rule. Grant County appealed to the WA Supreme Court, and the [Supreme Court overturned the Court of Appeals](#) and ruled that Grant County was entitled to assert the felony defense rule and remanded the case back to Division 3. This ruling was one of very few positive developments in the jail/tort world. Our Jail Liaison, Ric Bishop, adds that In the *Correctional Law Reporter* (CLR), December/January 2026, Volume XXXVII, No. 4, pp. 53–58, the article “A Fledgling, New Constitutional Responsibility: No ‘Unfettered Access’ to Contraband Drug” explores potential Eighth Amendment violations arising from jail officials’ failure to take reasonable steps to reduce the introduction and flow of contraband drugs into correctional facilities.

If you have a jail we encourage you and your legal counsel to review the article and its legal citations to assess potential liability exposure. Reviewing the Grant County decision, while considering the implications of this emerging duty-to-protect concept, may assist members in identifying measures to reduce risks to incarcerated persons, staff, and the public.

Thanks for all you do and stay safe! Steve