



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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Greetings from your Executive Director:

Here is an update on important legislative progress on our WASPC agenda.

Tomorrow, Wednesday, March 8th, is another cut-off where House bills have to pass the House and Senate bills have to pass the Senate in order to remain “alive” in the legislative process. Legislative committees will resume public hearings on bills that passed the other chamber after tomorrow. The next cut-off date will come on March 29.

Big bills at a glance:

[SB 5536](#) (Blake): This bill is alive (passed the Senate on Friday) and WASPC SUPPORTS this bill.

[HB 1363](#) (pursuits): This bill is alive for now (it has not passed the House), and WASPC SUPPORTS this bill.

[HB 1025](#) (“qualified immunity”): This bill is alive for now (it has not passed the House), and WASPC OPPOSES this bill.

[HB 1445](#) (AGO pattern & practice): This bill is alive for now (it has not passed the House), and WASPC OPPOSES this bill.

[HB 1513](#) (traffic stops): This bill is alive for now (it has not passed the House), and WASPC OPPOSES this bill.

Blake Bill, and the “Big Picture”

The “Blake fix bill”, SB [5536](#) passed the Senate on Friday March 3 but after a bitter floor debate [Senate Floor Debate - March 3 - TVW](#). We must assume it will be further amended as it is considered in the House. We expect that debates on other public safety measures will also be intense, if they are brought to the floor at all.

Public safety should not be about partisan politics. It’s about problem solvers in both parties looking to provide balance, and responding to their communities’ concerns about crime, safety, and public spaces. WASPC advocates for balanced, effective, and non-partisan public safety policy in this often-divisive environment.

There is real disagreement about public safety in Olympia among the majority party. It is also true in other areas of the country.

- In Chicago, incumbent Mayor Lightfoot was soundly defeated in a primary by a [fellow Democrat](#) who made the phrase “Public safety is a human right” the center of his campaign.
- In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams, also a Democrat and a strong public safety advocate, [said this](#) in response to the Chicago Mayor’s loss: “Mayors, we are closer. We’re closest to the problem,” Adams said Sunday, calling public safety a “prerequisite to prosperity”.

Pursuits

Last week, I appeared on [KIRO Radio](#) to talk about the status of the pursuits bills. The voices of [Mayors and elected officials](#), the [business community](#), and others have been very important in support for a change to the existing laws. Seattle Times columnist and cartoonist [David Horsey](#) writes “The current law may have been an overreaction and the new proposal looks like a smart modification...Crime is a real thing, not just a plot for a TV show, and criminals do not need to be given another way to evade justice.”

This week, a driver sped away from WSP troopers in Yakima and later crashed into a car, [killing two children.](#)

Here are some of the points we make to the media and our elected leaders as they consider the issue:

1. Legislation is necessary to reduce the number of people fleeing and flouting the rule of law and to bring justice to victims.
2. Bright line restrictions result in suspects knowing they can flee without consequences. Affording law enforcement even the possible ability to pursue suspects can change behavior and decision making by criminals. We need to “blur the line” and keep criminals guessing;
3. If auto thefts are included in offenses where a pursuit may be possible, it does not mean every stolen car will result in a pursuit. Agency policies and the strong balancing test contained in the HB 1363 still exist and law enforcement is committed to ensuring pursuits are rare and necessary;
4. Common sense says the increase in crime and emboldened criminals and drivers may be related to the pursuit law change. The Blake decision, along with other societal struggles within our communities have also contributed to this marked increase, but these issues point to the necessity for our legislature to take action to change these trends.
5. Finally, while advocates and some media like to label proposed changes as “rollbacks” or “reversals”, they are not. They should be considered refinements or modifications, ultimately resulting in better balance, that make the law more workable. This is not a binary choice.

This past week, [the Columbian](#) and the [Tri-City Herald](#) both published editorials pointing out the need to modify the restrictions to allow officers to more effectively protect our communities.

Development from this morning: A motion by Rep Wilcox in the House Rules Committee to “pull” the pursuits bill to the House floor was defeated. Soon thereafter, Rep Robertson made a motion on the

House floor to bring the bill to the House for consideration. That motion was defeated on a roll call vote. A copy of the roll call is attached for your information and reference.

Traffic Stops

[House Bill 1513](#) was heard and is subject to the Wednesday March 8 cutoff. This is the “Traffic Safety for All” bill that would prohibit traffic stops for equipment and other low-level violations. [Here](#) is WASPC’s testimony which starts at the 42-minute mark. These are the points we are making in our general opposition to the bill. It is worth noting that we strongly support the portion of the bill which provides for financial support for voucher and other programs to assist people with less means to get repairs or safety equipment repaired on their vehicles, so they are safer on the roadway:

1. The idea that HB 1513 helps law enforcement focus on more serious crimes assumes that an officer would pull someone over for a broken taillight instead of responding to an urgent 911 call. That does not happen.
2. This is another bill that, like HB 1310 last year and the pursuit law of 2021, broadly removes or restricts law enforcement from a number of interactions to reduce the chance of any bad outcome, with no accounting for the downstream effects. Our state’s experience with seat belts, cell phone use, vehicular pursuits, marijuana, drug possession, and others has clearly demonstrated that unlawful behavior continues and grows if the police can't do anything about it. The (again, predictable) result is more traffic deaths, more overdoses, and more crime. Restricting low level traffic stops will inevitably mean more people will drive unsafe cars, more people will not pay for tabs, and more people will flout the law. If the legislature wants to make those activities legal, change that law.
3. This adds another list of “permitted and prohibited” elements to the already complex decision tree officers must make for interactions. Meanwhile, the last two years and bills still being considered in the legislature, such as [HB 1025](#) and [HB 1445](#), send a strong message to our already understaffed law enforcement agencies and officers: focus more on limiting service and risk, less on serving the public, and potentially avoiding any situation which may create personal and agency liability due to ambiguous and complex laws. That may not be the legislature’s intent, but that is the likely result. These bills are a way to create more reactive and understaffed agencies, as the cost of providing public safety is increased. [Here](#) is the testimony on both bills in the House committee. It is important to note that while the legislature contemplates reducing civil protections for officers and agencies, they specifically retain qualified immunity for themselves. The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) has joined WASPC in strongly opposing these bills. However, the lack of unity among law enforcement groups regarding HB 1445 has made these challenges greater.

We will continue to keep a close eye on all these issues and will provide information for you as you discuss and communicate with your agency and community on these important issues.

As always, thanks for all you do and stay safe! Steve