



Washington Association of

**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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Greetings from Your Executive Director:

Here are a few updates as we head into August. We are all thinking about our fellow Sheriffs, Chiefs and their teams as they deal with severe wildfires in many parts of our state.

Automated License Plate Readers (APLR)

When we sent out the annual Crime in Washington Report for 2025 this week, we noted that limitations on technology could present challenges to further reductions in crime, while we also acknowledge that we all agree that appropriate guardrails are needed. [Here](#) is the kind of reporting we would expect, finding rogue officers using the technology for the wrong reasons, and [here](#) is a local story in which a broad and very diverse set of stakeholders are urging the Seattle Mayor to use cameras for public safety in that city. [Here](#) is a column regarding ALPRs from City Journal, which is a conservative-leaning media platform, that provides a good overview of the issue and some of the arguments against them along with a counterargument for each. The columnist also points out, correctly, that the opposition to cameras does not come from only one side of the political spectrum. We appreciate the work many of you have done to assist WASPC in developing basic guidelines as we work through implementing the new requirements.

Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) and Study regarding law enforcement mortality

[Here](#) is the most current data on law enforcement officer deaths, and [here](#) is a recent study on causes of mortality within the profession, summarized in "as first responders, LEOs face a unique constellation of occupational hazards that contribute to increased mortality risk. Our findings underscore the need for targeted intervention and prevention efforts to reduce the burden of cardiovascular, cancer-related, and suicide mortality among LEOs." I am passing on this as it pertains to our overall wellness efforts, and why they continue to be so important.

Civil Liability and the Sustainability of Government

If you have not seen [this](#) excellent document created by our colleagues at the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC), I encourage you to take a look. Just reading the executive summary portion up to page five provides a very good general overview of the environment of tort liability and how state decisions have contributed to where we are today. Counties and cities, along with jails and our law enforcement agencies, are facing a slow-motion train wreck of unsustainable liability

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claims. The State of Washington's [massive increase in payouts](#), particularly related to Dept. of Children Youth and Families lawsuits, is far exceeding budgeted funds and will place greater pressure on the next state budget. Many of our local jails have challenges in getting medical insurance, as providers are becoming more hesitant to do business in this state due to the tort environment. It is worth noting that of course, victims should receive justice; however, the current outlook is unsustainable. How does the state begin to achieve balance?

WSAC Executive Director Derek Young (a former Democratic member of the Pierce County Council) says, "Washington counties are quietly staring down insolvency, and the breaking point has arrived. Every single dollar taken from local budgets to fund massive, unfair litigation payouts is a dollar stripped away from law enforcement, the justice system, and health and human services. This isn't a legal debate; it's a fiscal emergency that is harming public safety. "

The white paper highlights several trends straining budgets, including:

- Claims submitted to the Washington Counties Risk Pool have increased by more than 60% since 2021.
- Liability insurance premiums have climbed more than 380% in the same period.
- Some county activities are now uninsurable.

"The current system has turned taxpayers into an insurer for the misconduct of others. County budgets can't continue to absorb these costs. We need a fair, sustainable system that protects residents and keeps essential services running," said Young.

The white paper outlines reform options for lawmakers to consider, including:

- Exempting certain types of government activities from liability in most cases.
- Implementing caps on damage awards for certain types of tort claims.
- Reforming joint and several liability rules.
- Creating an alternative process for addressing tort claims against state and local governments.

It emphasizes that accountability must remain intact. "Counties and other local governments should not escape accountability for genuine wrongdoing. But we need a system that recognizes the unique nature of mandated public services, provides predictable and sustainable cost structures, and ensures that taxpayer resources are used to serve communities rather than to fund excessive or unpredictable litigation. Lawmakers are forcing Washington counties into an impossible, dangerous corner: either we pay off out-of-control litigation, or we keep our jails open and our roads safe. The status quo is fundamentally broken and unsustainable. Just as the Legislature stepped up to stop this crisis in the 1980s, today's leaders must act immediately before the weight of these soaring costs completely bankrupts local governments," said Young.

The sustainability of jails and providing government services will be a major topic for our WASPC board over the next several months, and the article mentions that legislators are making efforts to begin to deal with the problem, but no actual changes have occurred. It should be noted that trial attorneys

have significant legislative influence. We intend to be a strong voice with our partners at WSAC, WAPA and others for reform in the litigation system and the long-term sustainability of local governments really is at stake.

Prosecutors Lawsuit

My counterpart at the WA Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (WAPA), Russ Brown, passed along this [complaint](#) filed by the Prosecutors of Pierce and Snohomish Counties. The issue of liability plays a big part in this lawsuit as well. The lawsuit asks the Court to declare that county juvenile facilities in their counties are under the jurisdiction of the courts, and therefore managed by the state and the state owns their liabilities. [Here](#) is the release accompanying the filing.

Denied Firearms

As you may know, we manage a legislatively-funded program called Denied Firearms Transactions, which provides funding and support for agencies to further investigate, and refer for prosecution, cases involving persons who attempt to purchase firearms when they are legally prohibited from doing so. Departments can receive funds for salaries and overtime for the work.

This week we received [this](#) set of summaries of five case summaries from the Seattle Police Dept., which has a detective working these cases. They include no identifying information. You will see they involve threats to the public and family members, are sometimes related to ghost guns, and have resulted in persons being held for involuntary treatment. This extra funding continues to be available for agencies across the state.

Stay safe and thanks for all you do! Steve