



Washington Association of
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Greetings from Your Executive Director:

Crime Statistics, Underreporting and National Trends

After we released the 2025 [WA State Crime Report](#) a few weeks ago, there has been some media coverage including [this story](#) on Fox 13 Seattle and [this](#) interview on KIRO Radio. You may also have had questions in your community where people feel like their experience is not matching the numbers. Some have also commented that part of the reductions (both in the state and nationally) may be related to underreporting and not reporting at all. Here are some salient points for you to consider:

- The numbers we report (and have been reporting since 1980) are based entirely on the information given to us by agencies in the state. So, they are a measure of crime REPORTED.
- Many crimes are chronically underreported and the frustrations or experiences of people, including businesses, over the last few years combined with our last-in-the-nation staffing level may have made that more pronounced.
- There are two data points that may help with that: 1) the National Retail Federation (NRF) last October published [national findings](#) that there has been an increase in violent incidents and, 2) "the majority (64%) of retailers say that they reported less than half of their store related theft incidents to law enforcement."
- Later this year the FBI will publish its annual [National Victimization Survey](#) which polls a large number of people to ask whether they were victims of crime, regardless of whether they reported it to police. It will provide another layer of information about whether underreporting is getting worse.

National groups like the [Council on Criminal Justice](#) proclaim that 2025 and 2026 show historic lows in crime across the country. The Washington State numbers, while improved, are not historically low. Our homicide rate is still above rates of ten years ago and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Decreases in crime are a good thing, but numbers don't matter if a person is a victim of crime.

In 2025, even with the reduced murder rate, we still had 236 victims of homicide. This [article](#) has some observations from the drop in homicides in Baltimore that are instructive for policy makers in our state. Among the reasons cited directly from the article:

- Baltimore's top prosecutor has focused on making illegally carrying guns, let alone using them, a very risky proposition in a city rife with firearms.
- That there are simply fewer murders to investigate is a big reason Baltimore's homicide clearance rate — the share of cases that result in an arrest — has risen to 60 percent this year, significantly above the national average, from 31 percent in 2015. (Detectives have more time and resources to work the cases).
- Some of the veteran drug dealers, men proficient at the use of violence, have been locked up.
- Ivan J. Bates became state's attorney in 2023, promising to hire more people and aggressively prosecute gun crimes. Since then, more than 1,500 people charged with illegal gun possession, mostly because of prior violent felonies, have been sent to prison.
- The Group Violence Reduction Strategy. This is based on the concept that a small group of people drive most of the violence. In weekly meetings at a Baltimore church, police officers, city employees and members of community organizations discuss people they have reason to believe are likely to be perpetrators or victims of violent crime. Members of the group visit these people, warning that they are on the city's radar but also offering services, including housing assistance and job training.
- Young people have a lot more to do these days... there are classes and community groups in places where there used to be nothing but the corner.
- Social media can be a problem, with videos of shootings and carjackings going viral. But, he said, the phone has also diluted the sway of the local street crews.

Continuing to drive down these numbers is an achievable goal, and it's an "and" not an "or"-- prevention, intervention, AND consequences.

Finally, on the topic of crime and public expectations, [this poll](#) conducted by the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, shows that "more than 8 in 10 voters want the city to prioritize shutting down open-air drug markets. While compassion remains high — 82% favor offering treatment and shelter first — those same individuals overwhelmingly agree that repeated refusals of help should trigger arrest and prosecution," and "the most striking finding is the near-unanimous demand for a larger police footprint in struggling neighborhoods. A staggering 90% of

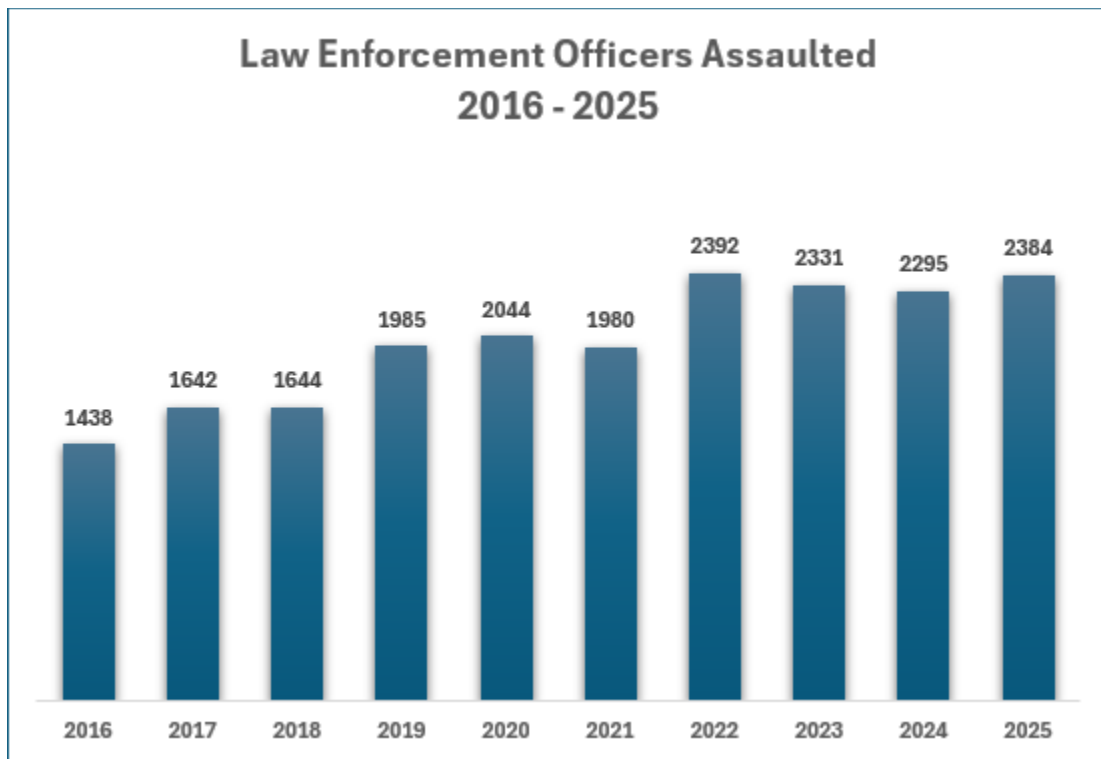
respondents favor regular foot and bicycle patrols in areas dealing with persistent problems, such as the open-air drug and stolen goods markets.”

Here’s the bottom line- public safety should unite us, not divide us. Safe neighborhoods are essential for strong families, thriving businesses, and healthy communities. Public safety is a core function of government. Unfortunately, public safety has become caught up in national political battles. Every election and every policy is increasingly treated as a referendum on national politics, making it harder to have honest conversations about local challenges and practical solutions. The debate should not be about "law and order" versus "prevention." Successful communities need both. They need effective law enforcement, prevention programs, treatment options, and accountability when individuals refuse assistance and continue to harm the quality of life of others. We should invest in programs that work and stop investing in those that do not.

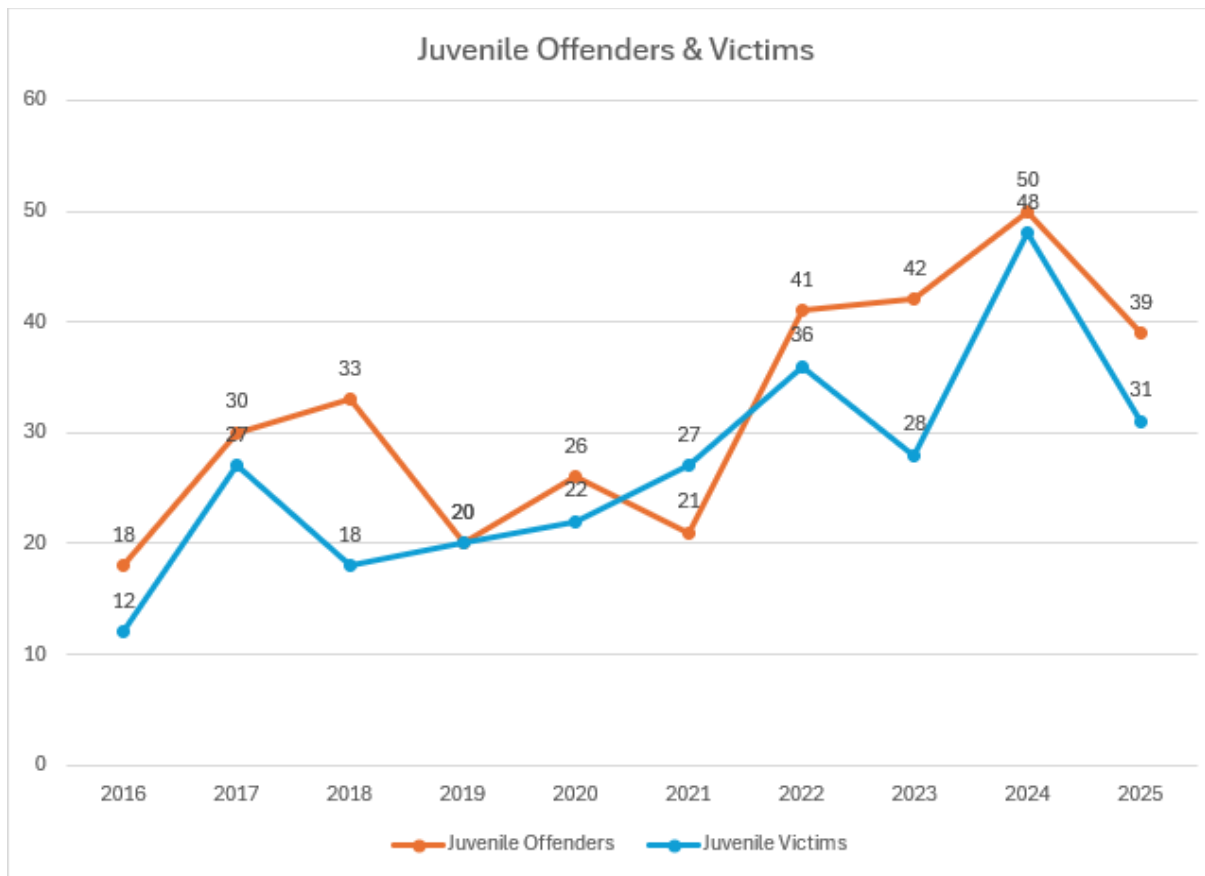
Crime Numbers and Trends that are Concerning

Among the good news in the statistics regarding crime, here are a few concerning data points to consider:

[Assaults against officers](#) in WA State have increased 65% over the last ten years:



There has been a lot of discussion since the Bite of Seattle shooting about how our state handles juveniles with firearms, and the number of times it takes for a juvenile arrested with a firearm to actually be detained. Over the last ten years, the number of juveniles who are either suspects in, or victims of, homicide [has more than doubled](#):



We have talked a lot about our state being last in the nation in per-capita staffing. We have been treading water for the last two years. [Here](#) is the full list of 2025 staffing for each state, ranked in order. It would take more than 1,600 additional officers in our state to reach the per-capita level of Oregon, which is in 50th place.

WA Supreme Ct. Bail Changes

For the last several months, the State Supreme Court has been reviewing possible changes to the state's bail system. The Court will hold another hearing Nov. 10 at 9 am according to the Court's [online calendar](#). The court has already received hundreds of written comments, including a letter opposing the change from WASPC and from many of you individually as executives. The proposal and the comments can be found [here](#). We'll continue to update you on this.

Interesting Academic Research

How many times have you handled or encountered an incident that resulted in serious or deadly use of force, determined that the person involved had been arrested (sometimes repeatedly) and

released or diverted, and thought “Why the \$%&^&% was that person out on the streets anyway?” We can all think of many cases where the public focuses like a laser on the split-second decisions that must be made by our deputies and officers, while there is little emphasis on the failures of the system to keep that person from forcing the confrontation in the first place.

For the first time in my memory, academic researchers have taken on this topic. In [this](#) paper, recently published by professors from the University of South Carolina and Texas State University, they consider a simple comparison.

A person convicted of a violent felony could face two different outcomes. In one, they serve a full prison sentence and have no contact with police during that period. In the other, their sentence is shortened, suspended, or replaced with a community-based alternative, allowing them to remain free. These two paths create different chances of future encounters with police, including encounters that could end in deadly force. The researchers call this difference the avertogenic effect: a police use of deadly force that becomes possible because an earlier decision reduced or avoided incarceration. The term is inspired by iatrogenesis, a medical concept describing harm caused by treatment. Here, the idea is reversed. The risk arises not from confinement itself, but from confinement that was avoided.

Courts reduce incarceration for many legitimate reasons, including fairness, rehabilitation, humanitarian concerns, and cost. But reduced incarceration can also have other consequences. When higher-risk individuals spend more time in the community, they have more opportunities for contact with police. More police contacts create more opportunities for rare but serious outcomes, including lethal encounters.

This argument is about trade-offs. Incarceration has well-known costs for individuals, families, communities, and public budgets. Advocates emphasize those costs. The avertogenic framework simply highlights a competing consideration: policies that reduce prison populations may also increase exposure to high-risk police encounters. Because people leaving prison often return to already disadvantaged communities, any increase in that exposure is likely to be concentrated in those same places. The idea builds on research on the incapacitation effect, which holds that incarceration reduces crime by limiting opportunities to offend. Research has long shown that a relatively small group of offenders is responsible for a disproportionate share of serious crime. The avertogenic framework extends this logic by focusing on police encounters. Decisions by judges, parole boards, and diversion programs influence who remains in the community, and those decisions

may affect how often police encounter high-risk individuals and how often those encounters turn dangerous. In short, reducing incarceration may lower some social harms while increasing exposure to others. The avertogenic framework is an attempt to identify and measure that trade-off.

...And Lastly

Finally, WASPC worked with Sen. Joe Nguyen when he served as a State Senator, and later he led the State Dept. of Commerce before becoming the CEO of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. He published a [column](#) this week that is really worth your time to check out. He says, in part:

“When elected officials abdicate their responsibility to govern, the loudest voices set the agenda, the most important problems go unsolved, and the public is left to deal with the consequences. Nothing tested my patience more as a state senator than hearing five words offered in place of serious policy debate. “That’s what the advocates want.” It drove me crazy. I could accept losing an argument or a colleague examining the same evidence and reaching a different conclusion. That is part of governing. What I could not accept was presenting data, raising an unintended consequence, or asking how a proposal would work, only to have those questions dismissed with that phrase. It sounded like listening. In reality, it was an excuse to stop thinking and a refusal to govern.”

Well said by CEO Nguyen and it describes a lot about public policy in our state. As leaders, we lead, do the heavy lifting, and try to be responsible stewards of the public trust and taxpayer dollars, while standing up for victims and public safety. Please know it is noticed and appreciated, even if it doesn’t always feel that way.

Thanks for all you do, and stay safe- Steve