



October 23rd, 2023

Greetings from your Executive Director:

Here are some updates, some “good to knows” and some information on legislative issues we will be working on in a few months (yes, we are just nine weeks from 2024...).

This week, you may have seen some national stories on how [crime is down](#) to “pre-pandemic levels”. The overall impression from the stories is we are all back to normal and it’s all good. Crime may be down nationwide, but here, not so much... The national murder rate may be down but the rate in Washington State remains at an all-time high. The recently released [2022 FBI crime report](#) states the murder rate was down 6.1 percent from 2021 nationwide. Washington state’s murder rate, however, for the same period was up 16.6 percent. The Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) immediately [issued a report](#) questioning the data and pointing out some issues with it.

What are the reasons we are going up while others are going down? There is never one single reason but here are some likely factors:

- the 2021 reform laws that focused on completely removing law enforcement from many interactions, resulting in emboldened criminals;
- juvenile questioning restrictions that have had the effect of forcing more kids into the criminal justice system and removed opportunities for intervention before it gets out of control;
- the fact that our state has been last in the nation in staffing for over a dozen years, and we have lost a net of 600 more officers over the last two years;
- our State’s Dept. of Corrections has reduced its Average Daily Population by over [30 percent](#) in the last five years and has closed facilities while our state population increases. Also, many of our [Superior Courts](#) are still backlogged from COVID restrictions in 2020-21.
- The increasing crisis of fentanyl and more people supporting a drug habit, with rapid increases in drug deaths while our state went back and forth about what strategies to use to combat it.

In our state, we are definitely not back to “normal” and this week Danny Westneat in the [Seattle Times](#) highlighted a case in which all of these factors are present and points out the frustration and fear of the community in light of the need for change. At the same time we are hearing more about underreporting- as one Chief told me this week, “I see that some of our frequently victimized

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businesses are no longer reporting (a result of corporate directives). It appears a combination of fear of a civil suit, being “canceled,” and less police response in some areas has led to inaction or despair.” **We will continue to work hard to send the message that public safety is a core function of government and good policing needs to be supported.**

Staffing, ambiguity about drug laws, and the need for better support for public safety continue to affect communities, victims, and families. This week, Fox 13 News did a good story on how these factors have [impacted a family in Seattle](#). The City of Marysville adopted [mandatory sentences](#) to help reduce community impacts, and Bellevue P.D. created a [specialized unit](#) to go after organized retail theft.

As we head into the legislative session next year, one of our priorities will be recruitment and retention funding and support for law enforcement. Adequate staffing is about reducing the number of our officers and deputies working mandatory overtime and responding to calls by themselves, reducing officer fatigue, increasing opportunities for de-escalation and community policing, and helping get some of our agencies out of the purely “reactive” mode. It is also important to note that the story about Bellevue creating a task force to address retail theft speaks to the fact that as our legislature raises the risks and costs of providing law enforcement, we will start to see the “haves” and the “have-nots” based on community resources and tax base, unless the state is willing to create additional supports. A community that has a low tax base and fewer financial resources than others may not have the staffing to create additional responses. This creates an equity issue as the provision of public safety is unequal based on what community you live in. In another state, a small police department that could not keep up with salaries is [looking to disband](#) and I think we need to recognize that the current environment may further create a polarized system where residents of lower tax-base communities will have significantly less public safety services in the future- and again, public safety is a core function of government and our legislature should make sure the single mom living in an apartment in a poorer community gets a similar response to her call for help than someone in a gated community in a wealthier area.

Some of you saw that the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) issued a [new report on pursuits](#), which recommends that pursuits be severely restricted to only violent crime and where there is an imminent threat to the public. I gave [an interview for a story](#) on the report and was also asked to speak about the issue at the PERF Town hall at the recent International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Conference. We contextualized this conversation with what happened in Washington State when lawmakers functionally prohibited pursuits a couple years ago. We shared that more people ran from law enforcement and that Washington generally experienced a significant spike in serious crime. As a result, I suggested that hyper-restrictive policies are not the answer, but there is certainly room to look into added alternatives which include increasing penalties for people who run, and equipping officers

with technology. We will be looking at all of this as we move into the legislative session, but the bottom line will be that anyone who considers running from the police needs to see that there will be meaningful and serious consequences, and our communities are tired of the environment of brazen criminality. We can all agree to find ways to limit pursuits but also need to balance that with consequences for criminals.

The professor who worked on the PERF study has also done some work on data regarding officer-involved shootings and use of force, and the ongoing narrative used by many in the media that if persons of any race have force used against them at a rate higher than the percentage of the population, that it equals bias. [Here](#) is a research paper published in 2019 that gets right to the point in the title: "Disparity does not mean bias". It is a relatively short paper and provides evidence-based research that narratives based on population for uses of force are misleading and, in the terms used in the paper, "a fundamentally flawed benchmark."

Finally, as we see increased tension involving the conflict in Gaza, please make sure you are connecting with the State Fusion Center if your community is seeing any increase in threats. We have sent out some additional information from DHS and FBI.