



April 21, 2023

Greetings from your Executive Director:

The legislative session has just a couple days to go, and our elected representatives have some major decisions to make. This week I would like to focus on what may be the most complex and critical policy decision: how to improve our society's response to the intersection of addiction, behavioral health, and public safety, all while we see record high numbers of overdose deaths and increasing violent crime.

The legislature has to decide on how to fix the *Blake* decision from two years ago, and remember that the stopgap "fix", which has proven to not work, has a sunset provision. If they do nothing, even the short-term "fix" goes away- drugs are just decriminalized, at least at the state level. The Senate took on this complex issue to focus on getting people the help and treatment they need while providing for meaningful consequences to leverage people to get treatment, all while following due process in an adversarial legal system. That's a lot to ask, but the bill that came out of the Senate (SB 5366), while not perfect, achieved a balance to provide a meaningful and workable gross misdemeanor consequence, but only if the person refused or failed at any number of "offramps". The bill focused on treatment first and helped to solve problems with laboratory delays and clearing criminal records for those who completed treatment. It worked toward the goals we agreed upon- treatment expansion and availability, reduced incarceration, and tools for law enforcement and navigators to get people help and hold accountable those who will not seek or accept treatment while affecting public safety. Accountability is key: a [study](#) by the Stanford University Network on Addiction Policy states that "Drug court effectiveness varies significantly. Research suggests that results are best when the court uses a transparent, consistent approach to applying sanctions, *has significant leverage over the offender*, and employs a uniform model."

The Senate had a robust debate and passed this bill with strong bipartisan support. We supported the Senate version and offer kudos to Senators Robinson (D-Everett) and Salomon (D-Shoreline) for their diligent work.

The House, which heard no bills about Blake at all, took the Senate bill and in one committee process completely changed the Senate's thoughtful approach. The House bill, after their changes in a committee, reduced the possible penalty to a misdemeanor, removed the requirement for lab tests to come back promptly, removed the requirement to vacate criminal records upon successful completion of treatment (now it would just be automatic after two years if there are no repeat offenses), and moved the entire focus to "harm reduction" strategies which include providing "safe" smoking equipment. The House bill, and most of the subsequent negotiations occurring now, will generally mean more of the same- condoned and enabled drug use, no effective or usable tools to incentivize treatment, and fewer commitments to
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reduce addiction. Notably, the budget has added some money to treatment infrastructure but not nearly enough. We sent out this [statement](#) expressing our opposition to the House version. Also, here is a [letter](#) authored by several Mayors around the state to legislators about their concerns with changes to the Blake bill.

The Senate this week concurred on the pursuits bill, which is an incremental improvement but will not affect significant changes in terms of emboldened criminals. During the House floor session on the pursuits bill, there were especially effective comments from Rep. David Hackney, who represents south King County. They are worth [hearing](#).

Data on public safety and crime trends

[Here](#) are some data on how state crime trends are exceeding national trends, and [here](#) is a survey completed by the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), which notes, “Interestingly, there’s been a large shift on the topic of public safety—where in just 23 months, the number of respondents rating public safety as a high priority (5 through 7 on the scale) went up by 14%.”

- In Jan. 2021: **72% of respondents** said that reducing crime is a high priority; and
- In Dec. 2022: **86% of respondents** said that improving public safety and reducing crime is a high priority.

[Here](#) is a column that is worth reading about where we are right now nationally on public safety.

The legislature is scheduled to adjourn Sunday night.

Finally, Marysville Chief Erik Scairpon has sent along his most recent [“Commissioner’s Corner”](#) with updates on the CJTC. We appreciate Chief Scairpon keeping all of us in the loop.

Thanks to each of you for all you do and stay safe!

Steve