



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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June 1, 2023

Greetings from your Executive Director:

WASPC's Spring Conference in Spokane last week had more attendees, almost 350, than ever before. It was good to see many of you there and congratulations to our two newest WASPC life members, Sheriff Casey Salisbury and Sheriff Rick Scott. Congratulations also to our newly elected board officers, who will join our 14-member Board of Directors:

- President: Sheriff Kevin Morris, Douglas County Sheriff's Office
- President-elect: Chief Darrell Lowe, Redmond Police Department
- Vice President: Sheriff John Nowels, Spokane County Sheriff's Office
- Treasurer: Chief Damon Simmons, Liberty Lake Police Department
- Chief at Large: Chief Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Department
- Sheriff At-Large: Sheriff Clay Myers, Kittitas County Sheriff's Office (re-elected)

Welcome to each of you and thank you for being willing to serve your fellow law enforcement leaders!

During the Public Trust committee meeting, an [excellent video](#) was shown highlighting a regional meeting with Clark County area leaders, which I am passing along for your information.

JAG Advisory Group and Seeking Comments

The State JAG (Justice Assistance Grant) Advisory Group is looking at an update to the Strategic Plan, and is seeking comments. I have shared with the group that while community outreach and researching best practices are worthy, the current trends we are seeing in overdoses makes any potential reductions in narcotics task forces a very concerning idea. Here is the link for comments if you wish to offer any:

Public Comment Opportunity

Please read the Draft Byrne-JAG Strategic Plan and submit your comments by Noon, Monday, June 19.

[View/download draft plan](#)

[SUBMIT COMMENTS](#)

988 CRIS Committee

Serving the Law Enforcement Community and the Citizens of Washington

The legislature formed the Crisis Response Improvement Strategy (CRIS) Committee to help implement the 988 system. As we have seen in many other similar committees, the group is sometimes seen as slanted toward removing law enforcement as any kind of response, with a focus on law enforcement as the bullies, rather than as the people who protect others from bullies. In our legislative work and our public outreach, we continue to call that out and encourage balanced approaches. Our WASPC representative, Chief Ron Harding of the Poulsbo Police Dept., has passed along this report on the committee and asked that we share it:

CRIS report to WASPC

I have served on the Crisis Response Improvement Strategy (CRIS) committee for the past 18 months as WASPC's sole law enforcement representative. This forty-member committee, along with the CRIS steering committee, was formed in 2021 to develop recommendations to support the implementation of the national 988 suicide prevention hotline in Washington State. One of the committee's tasks is to assess the current crisis and suicide prevention system in Washington, with one element of that system being 9-1-1 and first responders. The steering committee will ultimately provide recommendations and guidance to the Governor's office to improve behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention services in Washington.

Not unexpectedly, there is a desire within the committee and its sub-committees which aims to not only exclude Law Enforcement involvement in 988 calls but also reduce Law Enforcement's role in the Crisis Response System. A few members have attempted in every way possible to highlight the potential safety challenges that mobile crisis teams and other field responders (non-LE) may face without law enforcement support but to no avail. The opinion that Law Enforcement's response to 988 and even 911 calls is unnecessary and detrimental is strong and held at the highest level of decision-makers in this process. Two highly respected, nationally recognized subject matter experts, have resigned from the committee due to a sense that the final outcomes have been predetermined and contrary input is minimized and ignored.

I am nearly certain the final recommendations made to the Governor will be to exclude or severely reduce any role of law enforcement in Washington's 988 system. I would not be surprised if this has further implications for future grant opportunities offered by the legislature. If true, this will negatively impact embedded co-responder models, which depend on funding grants. There is a strong sentiment that the infrastructure proposed in legislation to support the 988 system will eliminate the need for social workers and mental health workers to be embedded in law enforcement agencies. Embedded, co-responder programs are viewed as an extension of law enforcement, and their credibility and efficacy are denigrated by that association. The committee has no representation from field workers operating in this capacity.

I encourage agencies with embedded, co-responder programs to secure them with non-grant dependent funding if possible. I would also encourage agencies to become members of the Co-Responder Outreach Alliance, a Washington State nonprofit that advocates for police and fire co-response programs. Please feel free to contact me for more information about the CRIS or any of the opinions mentioned above.

Sincerely, Ron Harding, Poulsbo PD

In addition, another member of the advisory group has published this resignation:

Dear HMA Team and CRIS Steering Committee:

I spent the afternoon today, reviewing material and watching the video from the May 11 Crisis Systems and First Responders Collaboration workgroup. I am disappointed that CRIS' first opportunity to take a "deep dive" into the role of first responders in crisis response was used near-exclusively to criticize first responders and co-responders. This is not respectful of the men and women on the 911 side who take the call—every day—to help people who mobile crisis teams can't or won't assist. It is also not productive. In my year and a half on the CRIS, I have come to understand that facilitators are more interested in giving voice to critics of 911 response than discussing what works when first responders and co-responders respond to a crisis call—asking why these professionals are relied on so heavily to respond to these calls--or exploring opportunities for meaningful system improvement. This "us and them" approach is the group's prerogative. But I no longer can, with clear a conscience, be a part of this negative process.

Thank you for the hard work you all have done, and continue to do, to improve our crisis system. I hope we have the opportunity to work together in a different context.

Kimberly Hendrickson, Housing, Health and Human Services Director, City of Poulsbo

Crime Stats

As we do each year, we will be planning to publicly release the annual crime statistics and the "Crime in Washington (CIW) Report for 2022 the first week of July.

Our Legislative Committee meeting is coming up June 13- here are the details and remember if you are a WASPC member, you are on the legislative committee! We hope you can join us.

To register for the meeting, [please click here.](#)

For feedback to submit an idea, [please use the form here.](#)

Tuesday, June 13th, 10:00 AM.

Finally, our conference is a good opportunity to see each other in person. We spend a lot of time on webinars and communicating in writing, but to see you, the people who are out there leading our law enforcement professionals each day, is empowering to all of us here at WASPC. It is our honor to work with you and thanks for all you do--

Stay Safe- Steve