

WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS & POLICE CHIEFS

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Serving the Law Enforcement Community and the Citizens of Washington

April 1, 2019

Greetings from Your Executive Director:



There is no worse nightmare for any Sheriff or Chief than to have a Deputy, Officer or Trooper killed in the line of duty. All of us mourn the loss of Kittitas County Sheriff's Deputy Ryan Thompson. We appreciate the leadership of Kittitas County Sheriff Gene Dana, Kittitas Police Chief Chris Taylor, and Ellensburg Police Chief Ken Wade at this difficult time.

We had our **Firearms Workgroup meeting** on March 12th, which included about 50 people from around the state. Many were records managers and those responsible for implementing some of the new requirements of I-1639 starting July 1. The bottom line from this meeting was that the requirements and elements of this new law have several components that are simply undefined and many questions remain unanswered. Jamie Weimer from our staff here at WASPC created a summary of topics and areas discussed at the meeting, which is [attached](#).

WASPC is not directly responsible for any of these changes- we are simply trying to facilitate the sharing of information and hope this will support you as you develop plans to handle these new requirements. One of the key takeaways from the meeting is that there are questions from the initiative that simply have no answer- see the "Outstanding Questions" section on the attachment. Our next step will be to create an informational bulletin for members and FFLs. We will also be holding a panel on 1639 at our May conference to discuss these issues.

I have mentioned in a few newsletters **our general opposition to the continuing "small" expansion bills for access to alcohol and marijuana**, and shared our letter to all legislators about our concern over the cumulative effect of expansion to access. Here is a [link](#) to an article about a bill from craft distillers on this issue:

Most of you are aware of the **"Trueblood" settlement regarding a court case** against the state of Washington over long waits for evaluation and competency restoration at the Western and Eastern State Hospitals for people deemed incompetent to stand trial for criminal acts. In addition to increased mental health funds for facilities around the state (which is good), the State's plan to "solve" the problem of the long waits involves changing how we deal with those declared incompetent to stand trial for misdemeanor crimes. Currently, anyone accused of a non-violent misdemeanor is automatically dismissed from criminal charges, but last year over one hundred people who had been charged with violent misdemeanor crimes were put on the wait list for competency evaluations at the state hospitals. By the way, this all comes back to the concept that the general public believes that if someone is so mentally ill that they cannot stand trial and be held responsible for their criminal act, they certainly must be so mentally ill that they go "somewhere"... and as we know the reality is they are sometimes simply released back out onto the street, to interact with and sometimes have bad interactions with the public and law

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enforcement. There was a [story](#) this past week about a man with misdemeanor charges who was back on the street after being declared incompetent to stand trial, and the violent acts he committed.

Anyway, part of the proposal from the State this year to alleviate the wait-list problem and answer the Trueblood lawsuit was to expand some mental health services, do quicker evaluations for those held for competency for felonies, but to also release and dismiss all misdemeanors, regardless of whether they were violent or not. So- quicker evaluations for felony charges, but all misdemeanors presumptively released back onto the street. We strongly advocated for a better solution than that, and the good news (so far) is that the current budget proposals this week include treatment for misdemeanors sent for competency. This is a good sign but we will keep an eye on the budget as it progresses.

In other budget proposal news, the Democratic House budget, which is a pretty good indicator of how the eventual budget will look, has funding for more BLEA classes, a small increase for mental health field response grants, and overall increases for mental health services.

Last week, **KOMO did an hour-long program** called "[Seattle is Dying](#)"-if you are on the east side you may not have seen much about this:

The program has led to lots of discussion, as well as attacks that it is biased and demonizes the homeless. The really interesting aspect, however, is the examination of programs in other states, like Rhode Island, where social services and treatment are combined with real consequences and follow through. One of the missing elements in the ongoing polarized discussion about criminal justice and homeless people is having a **balanced approach**- it seems to be all or nothing right now. Real solutions will require better social services, and treatment, but also real consequences and accountability. Our "Principles for Public Trust" for WASPC says:

WASPC SUPPORTS A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS. THERE ARE MANY COMPLEX DYNAMICS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ISSUE. CRIMINAL TRANSIENTS AND THOSE WHO WILLINGLY COMMIT CRIMES SHOULD BE PROSECUTED WITHIN THE LAW. THEY ARE NOT IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS HOMELESS PERSONS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND ADDICTIONS, WHO NEED AND WILL ACCEPT HELP. WE URGE POLICY MAKERS TO DELINEATE BETWEEN THESE TWO GROUPS AND SOLUTIONS SHOULD RECOGNIZE THEIR DIFFERENCES.

The legislature is holding a "homeless panel" informational hearing Tuesday this week at 11:00 AM- Spokane Chief Craig Meidl, Auburn Chief William Pierson, Kent Commander Mike O'Reilly and Kent Officer Joe Mello will testify on trends and what each community is facing in terms of this issue. One of the main themes I am seeing is the **disconnect between the public narrative that "law enforcement is criminalizing homelessness" and what officers and deputies are actually doing out there**-which is sometimes the only service providing any positive interaction with people who may need help. The friction comes in when some policy makers see all homeless persons as "victims" and resist any kind of accountability for criminal behavior, while most in law enforcement can clearly see the effects of criminal transients on the community and on vulnerable homeless people. It does feel like we are having better conversations about this topic statewide, and some of the programs the legislature is looking to

fund would be an improvement- we just need to keep focused on the necessity of improved availability of services and criminal sanctions when they are needed.

Another issue out there right now for the legislature is the **50% "good time" bill** we have discussed in recent newsletters. Here is the bottom line: the Dept. of Corrections is over capacity, and the DOC and the legislature are trying to plan for capacity issues over the next few years. The legislature has made it very clear that they are not going to build another prison, and the current political environment is not conducive to doing anything to change that. Washington has grown by about a million people over the last ten years, with no substantive increase in prison capacity. Current efforts to deal with that problem involve 50% good time, more automatic releases for offenders over 60 or 65, and more work release. There are also proposals to no longer have prison time as a possibility for drug possession of any kind or amount. However, even if all of these were instituted, it only deals with the issue for 5-6 years, and we are back to the same problem- it's just math. This is another example of how we need to be at the table to ensure that any solutions pay full attention to public safety, justice and victims, not solely helping offenders and saving money. Stay tuned...

As you can see, we are facing lots of political headwinds right now, and we continue to raise our hand and say loudly that while sentencing reform and the myriad of other bills out there are worthy of discussion, public safety matters.

Now for some good news- the weather is good, the Mariners are 5-1, and you are part of a profession that continues to be respected and valued. **Thanks you for all you do!**

WORK HARD- HAVE FUN- STAY SAFE

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