



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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December 4, 2020

Greetings from your Executive Director:

I hope everyone had a good and safe Thanksgiving. I offer my continued best wishes as we head toward (thankfully) the end of what has been a particularly hard year for many of us. Thanks to those of you who were able to attend some or all of our virtual conference, and we hope you found the information useful and relevant. I spoke with one of our Sheriffs last week, who said the training was good but quickly added, “I can’t wait to get in line for a vaccine so we can do these in person again sometime!” I agree.

The disconnected nature of these meetings, and the lack of the “off screen” conversations and networking, reflect the dynamic of our times: kids trying to learn from a computer screen, less interaction with people from different perspectives, and even more of the “echo chamber” of opinions many people get on social media. If you have followed the decisions made by the Seattle City Council over the last few months via their remote meetings, you can see how that disconnection affects how policy makers get information and create policy.

We will need to be especially aware of this as we move into a busy 2021 legislative session. The pandemic and remote communication may make it easier to cater to hashtags, to also offer solutions that sound good but actually make the problem worse—this has led to more division, more cynicism, and more demonization. We need to remain focused on thoughtful, sensible reform. We encourage you to make the extra effort to reach out and communicate with your local legislators—it is always important but this year more than ever.

In a recent “PERF Clips” post, Chuck Wexler at the Police Executive Research Forum, said it very well – “reform and good police work cannot be mutually exclusive”. He went on to point out, “This defunding rhetoric and actions of local politicians have made working cops think twice about engaging in proactive police work. Importantly, it is not because they lack the will to do their jobs. Rather, they simply fear that the current environment isn’t sympathetic to the complexities of police work. Politicians will rush to judgment without understanding the full context.”

In a recent article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, a letter to the editor noted in response to the continued increases in crime there, “a community group is suing the city for holding the concept of safety hostage to the concept of reform. It is not viable to sacrifice one to the other.” Surely we can achieve both?”

Many of the “reforms” in other parts of the country have had the opposite of the intended effect - they further distance the community from law enforcement, and the very people we need the most will either leave or choose not to become officers, deputies, or troopers. This is important work, but we have to balance public safety and reform, if we are going to get it right.

Change will occur at the federal level in January and it is worth noting what Congressman James Clyburn of South Carolina, an early supporter of President-Elect Biden, said after the election. He said policy

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makers need to “stop sloganeering”, referring to the phrase “defund the police”, and to focus on “headway not headlines”.

In other words, now the hard work to develop real policy begins. Our [policy reforms](#) are aimed at making the problems better, not worse. They are also focused on ensuring good people enter this important and honorable profession, and provide the tools and support to do it the right way.

Have a good weekend, and stay safe-

- Steve