



FOR RELEASE
January 7, 2022

Statement attribution:
Steven D. Strachan, Executive Director

**WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS AND POLICE CHIEFS
PRE-SESSION STATEMENT**

WASPC URGES OUR LEGISLATORS TO FOCUS ON JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS AND BALANCE IN REFORMS

(Lacey, WA) --- One year ago, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) urged the legislature to adopt balanced police reform policies. A year later, our communities, our Chiefs and Sheriffs, and the authors of the 2021 reform legislation all recognize and acknowledge that the new laws need amendments and improvements. We urge efforts that focus on advancing productive reform for public safety and achieving justice for victims. Crime and community safety are not partisan issues. We call upon all legislators to bring us together to resolve the negative consequences some law changes have had on communities across our state.

WASPC has long supported constructive, balanced reform focused on [principles that build trust](#), and [our recommended reforms](#). We have been consistent in recognizing the need for change, our active participation in it, and our willingness to work for thoughtful and productive reform. Lawmakers passed the 2021 law changes to reduce violent interactions involving law enforcement. Unfortunately, some of these changes eliminated or limited major components of proactive enforcement, resulting in emboldened criminals, rising crime, and increasingly brazen contempt for the law.

The 2021 laws do not allow law enforcement to use reasonable or necessary force to carry out temporary investigative detentions of people reasonably suspected of criminal activity. This development is not consistent with long-standing U.S. Supreme Court precedent and resulted in establishing the nation's most restrictive law of its kind. Investigative stops are the foundation of proactive policing and safe communities. We support changes that would allow reasonable force while complying with the new duty of care standards when persons choose to flee lawful detention.

Restrictive changes to use of force laws have resulted in fewer people getting the help they need, more persons with behavioral health problems ending up in jail, and more criminals flouting the law and victimizing others. Homicides continue to trend upward, auto thefts are up over 50 percent statewide since the new laws went into effect, and the King County Prosecutor's "Shots Fired" report shows shootings are up 40 percent in King County, and 81 percent of reported victims are persons of color.

We see firsthand the consequences of victimization: lives turned upside down by robberies, assaults, theft, and violations of a sense of well-being and security. We need the tools and the authority to get people the help they need; to arrest, jail and prosecute people who victimize others; and the additional officers and resources to facilitate de-escalation and provide increased safety in our communities.

Instead, we currently have fewer tools, restrictions that severely limit our ability to help bring justice for victims of crime, and significantly reduced staffing.

WASPC understands and appreciates that the 2021 Legislature intended to enact reforms to make all persons safer – a laudable goal that we all share. However, as WASPC noted in its published objections to the 2021 proposals, legal details matter. Comments, statements of good intentions, and interpretations by advocates, legislators, or others have no legal effect on what the law says or how law enforcement agencies must abide by it. The law must be followed and can only be changed by an act of the legislature or the courts.

WASPC remains hopeful and confident that the 2022 legislature, being now fully aware of the consequences of the current state of the law, will enact thoughtful and meaningful improvements that will reduce victimizations, promote public safety, and embrace proactive policing.

As the legislative session starts, WASPC will work for nonpartisan, constructive reform, and measures to improve the public trust that protects victims. WASPC's summary of its legislative agenda for 2022 can be found [here](#).

###