



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

3060 Willamette Drive NE
Lacey, WA 98516
360-486-2380 (Phone)
360-486-2381 (Fax)
www.waspc.org

September 20, 2021

Greetings from your Executive Director:

Just a few updates today—

If you have any members of federal task forces be aware of a new policy [Department of Justice Announces Department-Wide Policy on Chokeholds and 'No-Knock' Entries | OPA | Department of Justice](#) issued this week from the Dept. of Justice regarding carotid restraint and no-knock warrants. Also from the DOJ, they issued this [posted](#) guidance regarding new rules for federal monitors. *Note: HB 1054, enacted during the Washington State 2021 session, also prohibited chokeholds and neck restraints and no-knock warrants (see RCW 10.116.020 and RCW 10.31.040 respectively).*

Also on the federal front, there are bills being considered now that would increase access to Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) in jails by reducing prescriber regulations and providing Medicare coverage for inmates in the 30 days prior to release. This has been a longtime issue advanced by Sheriffs and others who bear the cost of medical coverage for local inmates. We will keep an eye on that bill.

Also, I have been asked if the Governor's mandates regarding state employees and health care workers being vaccinated would affect BLEA officers or those attending training sessions at CJTC- I checked with the Director and it is my understanding they are not requiring vaccinations other than their own employees and paid contractors.

Here are a few recent examples of Sheriffs and Chiefs communicating with our communities about the effects of reform laws, paired with a sort of "perfect storm" of other issues that are leading to unintended effects. The outcomes are the opposite of what was intended- everyone has a stated goal of better outreach for those in crisis, less involvement in the criminal justice system, and more safety for everyone. Instead, as has been mentioned before, we did this backward- we removed and restricted law enforcement without creating the behavioral health infrastructure to fill the gap. Specifically:

- Reduced staffing within both law enforcement agencies and behavioral health systems, along with the legal advice agencies have received from their legal advisors regarding the new use of force restrictions and Involuntary treatment holds, reduce field outreach and connecting with those in crisis. Less outreach means more persons decompensate. This was highlighted in this [article](#).
- The same restrictions are resulting in the most severe behavioral health cases being unresolved and more crimes, arrests, and concern among behavioral health providers, as cited in this [article](#) where the crisis services manager comments "...the current situation is not working. It's not safe for clients, it's not safe for the community."
- In this [video](#) the Spokane Commercial Property Council hosts a presentation from Sen. Billig and Sheriff Knezovich about the reform laws. There are questions from the business owners about changes for limited commission officers; the new laws have made it riskier to provide those

Serving the Law Enforcement Community and the Citizens of Washington

commissions and that is impacting their businesses, and they refer to more aggressive behavior and the problems it has created. Another business owner connects the Senator's reference to how the new use of force law does require more time and deliberate response, and how it has increased response times to their business because it has tied up officers on other calls. Spokane Chief Meidl has told me that an example of increased responses to calls is their SWAT callouts, which have increased in number and duration. What took 2 to 3 hours prior to July now takes 8 to 9 hours. That also means more patrol time on perimeters, less officers available to respond to calls, etc. He added that response time to calls overall have significantly increased; it is going to be interesting to look at response time data compared to response times for Priority calls prior to July 25. Also, this [column](#) was published last week in the Spokane paper.

- The Seattle Times' [Danny Westneat](#) wrote about safety concerns from business owners in Seattle. He wrote, "a delicate balance has been jarred loose recently." One business owner commented, "You didn't get that sort of brazen aggressiveness as much before." Westneat also writes, "What I suspect is going on here is yet more fallout from the backward drive to reimagine or defund the police. I've [written about this before](#): how the city, and now the state Legislature, are trying to get armed police officers out of the business of going to every distress call related to mental illness and drugs. It's a sound goal — it'd probably be better in many of these situations to have mental health counselors coming to the scene than cops. But the problem is the city and state haven't yet stood up any replacement for the police — let alone judged it to see if that replacement works."

The need for the legislature to repair these problems in the laws is very clear, and we will continue to work with you as we move forward.

Also, [here](#) is a good video with Fife Chief Fisher and the Mayor of Fife discussing and explaining some of the issues related to the reform laws and how the department is responding, training and handling these changes.

Many thanks to those of you who forwarded or publicized the [statement](#) we issued regarding ambushes of law enforcement and the general lack of public attention these incidents received. I appreciate the Board's strong support in ensuring that these never become "normalized" or somehow minimized.

Finally, here is an [excellent story](#) highlighting two Auburn P.D. detectives.

Stay Safe,

- Steve