



FOR RELEASE
March 17, 2022

Statement attribution:
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WASPC POST LEGISLATIVE SESSION STATEMENT

(Lacey, WA) --- The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) thanks legislators for their follow up and necessary adjustments to the 2021 package of reform laws as well as the use of force definition provided by the legislature in the 2022 legislative session. We are however, disappointed and concerned that state law will continue to allow criminals to flee in vehicles without consequence. This intentional lack of action by the legislature will result in continued emboldened criminal behavior, increased crime, reduced public safety, and does not balance reform with attention to victims of crime.

The Washington Attorney General's [January 2022 opinion](#) made it very clear the legislature needed, at minimum, to provide clarity and a specific definition of use of force, which was accomplished during the 2022 session. WASPC appreciates the passage of legislation that clarify public policies and works to protect public safety. The 2022 legislative actions that help clarify policies, better serve communities and provide assistance for those who need it include:

- HB1719 authorizes the use of less lethal munitions
- HB 1735 clarifies police to use force in civil and community caretaking situations
- HB 2037 defines "use of force" and provides for investigative detentions

For these bills, House and Senate members worked hard to find balanced and fair solutions to the unintended consequences of bills passed in 2021, and we are appreciative. Governor Inslee also deserves recognition for quickly signing the laws so they took effect immediately.

Unfortunately, another bipartisan supported measure (SB 5919) to change restrictions on pursuits to reasonable suspicion, rather than probable cause, of certain violent crimes and sex offenses, was not enacted. The legislature's decision to not pass SB 5919 leaves a critical gap in police reform "fixes".

"I have never seen criminals as emboldened as they are now. Our mayors, law enforcement, and the community asked for help, and the legislature made the specific decision to continue to allow for brazen contempt for the law," said Steve Strachan, executive director. "No one wants more pursuits, which are inherently dangerous, but current law has created an atmosphere of flouting the law even on simple traffic stops. This atmosphere is, and will continue to be, unacceptable and dangerous to public safety. Fleeing in a vehicle should not be a get-out-of-jail-free card."

It is important to note that amendments to the police reforms of 2021 still hold law enforcement to the Duty of Reasonable Care under the law to both de-escalate and follow a duty to preserve and protect all human life. We are committed to the accountability measures that were part of these reforms, which have not changed.

WASPC and its members have long supported constructive, balanced reforms focused on principles that build trust, recognize the sanctity of life, and bring justice to victims of crime. Law enforcement need the appropriate tools to fight and prevent crime. WASPC will continue to work with legislators throughout the interim to find common ground to prepare for additional legislative action in the 2023 session. 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.

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