

WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SHERIFFS & POLICE CHIEFS

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Serving the Law Enforcement Community and the Citizens of Washington



January 25, 2019

Greetings from your Executive Director:

First a quick update on the **I-940 amendments**, because I know this continues to be an important area of concern for you and your departments members: as I mentioned yesterday the bill with the amendments (found under House Bill 1064) were voted out of the House unanimously (98-0!), and the Senate is now expected to vote on the bill Wednesday of next week. We are still pushing for the bill to be signed by the Governor as soon as February 1. We deeply appreciate those of you who have been contacting your legislators and underlining the need for prompt action on this bill- we are almost there!

The process of coming together with community groups and legislators that has produced the clarified language for I-940 is an example of WASPC playing a positive role in a polarized environment. When the amended bill was passed yesterday on the House Floor, Rep. Roger Goodman, a Democrat from Kirkland who has been a key leader in changing the deadly force *standard and in the negotiations for this process, made these comments:*

THROUGH LONG AND HARD WORK WE WERE ABLE TO FIND COMMON GROUND AND BUILD CONSENSUS AND BUILD EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING THAT OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT HAVE A REALLY TOUGH JOB. THEY RUN INTO THE DANGER, WHILE THE REST OF US RUN THE OTHER WAY. THEY SAY GOODBYE TO THEIR LOVED ONES IN THE MORNING NOT KNOWING WHETHER THEY'RE ACTUALLY GOING TO COME HOME ALIVE AT THE END OF THE DAY... AND, FROM MANY IN VULNERABLE UNDER-REPRESENTED COMMUNITIES, A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT FEELS LIKE NOT TO GET THE RESPECT THEY DESERVE... SO WE WERE ABLE TO BUILD EMPATHY AND BUILD UNDERSTANDING AND THE MEASURE BEFORE US REFLECTS THAT PROCESS.

THE VOTERS OF THE STATE APPROVED THE INITIATIVE BY A SIGNIFICANT MARGIN AND YET STILL BOTH LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE IMPROVEMENTS THAT NEED TO BE MADE THAT WE CAN STRENGTHEN AND CLARIFY THE LANGUAGE OF THE INITIATIVE SO THIS MEASURE IS NOT A COMPROMISE. THIS IS ACTUALLY, AS I SAID, A CONSENSUS AGREEMENT MAKING THE INITIATIVE STRONGER AND EASIER TO UNDERSTAND AND EASIER TO IMPLEMENT.

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The imbroglio this past week about the **Covington High School students at the Lincoln Memorial** was an interesting demonstration of the environment we are trying to operate in right now. This public environment, a mix of social media, traditional media, and the divisive and sensationalized rhetoric that is getting attention now, provides for an instructive example of the challenges we face.

You have likely seen at least a little information about how the "viral video" stoked up the Twitter Outrage Machine, and the national media quickly fed into it, sensationalizing and reporting facts about the story that turned out to be at least incomplete, if not false. The venerable New York Times and the Washington Post, after reporting stories based mostly on looking at Twitter, issued corrections and headlines using phrases like "a fuller and more complicated picture emerged", which also means "we pushed an incorrect story based on social media and reaction". Any pretense of traditional media outlets being balanced and thorough in their reporting seems to have been exposed and they've had to admit how these stories are developed. As we have seen before, social media drives the narrative.

Following the overreaction and zig-zagging coverage of the incident at the National Mall, columnist David Brooks in the New York Times wrote, "these days **the social media tail wags the mainstream media dog**. If you want your story to be well placed and if you want to be professionally rewarded, you have to generate page views - you have to incite social media. The way to do that is to reinforce the prejudices of your readers."

Brooks goes on to say that we continue to react to new technologies we don't know how to control- and he asks if we are at a "pivot point" where things may change. Or- do we go right back to the same thing? Here is the column if you're interested:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/21/opinion/covington-march-for-life.html>

WASPC's communications consultant, Barbara Smith has conducted media sessions with many of our members where she discusses the fact that some media outlets incentivize their reporters by how many "clicks" their stories receive. It drives media coverage that needs to be constantly updated and often uses sensational headlines to encourage more page views. In other words, ad revenue is driven by being the first to report information. Look at the headlines in any newspaper or website and you will clearly see how they are trying to attract your "click" by this tactic.

This seems to highlight the challenges we face as **law enforcement incidents, particularly involving deadly force, are seen through this prism**. Mr. Brooks' column is worth reading, because he makes the valid point that all of us need to start recognizing the very negative effects of this current Twitter culture- and those of us in law enforcement see it up close every day. The answer does not seem to be more antagonism and negativity, and it also does not seem to be simply giving in and quickly making value judgments hoping the whole controversy will go away, as the students' school seems to have done. To borrow a phrase from the newspaper, perhaps we should all commit to ensuring a "fuller and more complicated picture", such as when law enforcement officers need to make split-second decisions in highly stressful and dangerous

situations. Working with community groups, building trust, and understanding that not every incident has a hashtag-worthy solution is a start.

All of us, as Chiefs and Sheriffs, have an opportunity to take this "pivot point" and continue to show leadership in emphasizing our need to slow down, listen to each other, and appreciate the challenges and perspectives of other people. In other words, we all need to start rejecting the Twitter Outrage Machine. Improvement will not come from national leaders, national media, and certainly not Twitter- it is up to us and our communities.

This past week, the House Commerce and Gaming Committee heard a bill that would **legalize personal grows and possession of marijuana** for up to six plants for anyone over 21. Yes, you read that correctly. We testified that we are seeing substantial problems with illicit marijuana grows and organized crime across the state due to the "permissive legal environment" of marijuana right now, as well as the challenges of enforcement of lower level dealing or possession, and the difficulty in prosecution and general lack of public support for enforcement. Legalizing home grows and possession would make all of those challenges even more difficult. Here is a link to the bill and the hearing if you're interested, and the WASPC testimony begins at 1:14:00:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1131&Year=2019>

<https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2019011160>

A bill has also been introduced that will **mandate Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) in all jails** by 2020 or 2021. While MAT for opioid addiction has already been introduced in many of our state's local jails, and providing MAT is a worthy and admirable goal, another unfunded (and potentially extremely expensive) mandate would create some real challenges for many of our jails. We will continue to monitor this issue, but be aware it is out there.

Finally, here is a really good video of Spokane PD dealing with a person with excited delirium. This should become "viral" to show the great work being done by our officers and deputies every day:

[Police help man suffering from excited delirium](#)

Have a great weekend-

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