



Washington Association of
**SHERIFFS &
POLICE CHIEFS**

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

August 16, 2019

Greetings from Your Executive Director:

Many of us have heard of **incidences of “Swatting”**, where someone fraudulently calls in a violent crime in order to target someone with a large police response. What started as revenge among gamers in basements has morphed into swatting apparently being used as a sort of political weapon against columnists and others. Leonard Pitts, a national columnist who lives near Baltimore, was a victim a few months ago. As you know, this is incredibly dangerous not only to the victims of these hoaxes but to law enforcement as well. A person was inadvertently killed in one of these hoaxes in Wichita, Kansas in 2017. The incident apparently had grown out of a \$1.50 bet involving the game *Call of Duty*.

As we shake our heads and think about the sad fact that this has become a “thing”, it is nevertheless dangerous and another dynamic to stack on top of all the other things we have to handle as safely as possible. Here is a link to an [article](#) that highlights Seattle PD’s service to allow people to [sign up](#) and be contacted immediately in case they are a victim of swatting- which would increase safety for everyone. In addition, here is a [link](#) to a twitter account for Ijeoma Oluo, a writer and activist who was a victim of swatting and spent anxious hours on a plane getting back to our state while a swatting incident was taking place. She credits the safe and effective response from the King County Sheriff’s Office.

This topic and a registry might be a good idea to discuss with our PSAPs as a preventive measure.

Last week I sent out a few links to a study with significant findings about the **current national dialogue involving race and officers use of deadly force**. Here is a [link](#) that further outlines the study from Michigan State University.

Here are some key findings as highlighted in the article:

By connecting the findings of police officer race, victim race and crime rates, the research suggests that the best way to understand police shootings isn’t racial bias of the police officer; rather, by the exposure to police officers through crime.

The vast majority – between 90% and 95% – of the civilians shot by officers were actively attacking police or other citizens when they were shot. Ninety percent also were armed with a weapon when they were shot. The horrific cases of accidental shootings, like mistaking a cell phone for a gun, are rare, Cesario said.

“We hear about the really horrendous and tragic cases of police shootings for a reason: they’re awful cases, they have major implications for police-community relations and so they should get attention,” Cesario said. “But, this ends up skewing perceptions about police shootings and leads people to believe that all fatal shootings are similar to the ones we hear about. That’s just not the case.”

In the current polarized “fake news” environment, a study like this is too easy to use as an “I told you so” by one side, or to be discounted or ignored by those who are on the other side of the argument. However, this provides some good information for us to actually start having some constructive dialogue about reducing officer involved shootings. First, recognize that it is involvement in violent crime, and the actions of the person involved, that drive the vast majority of outcomes. Second, viral and emotional examples drive public opinion but don’t tell the whole story. **Reducing violent crime and better mental health resources are key to reducing the incidents that lead to law enforcement deadly force.**

However, this is not an *either/or* proposition. As WASPC has made clear in our [Principles for Public Trust](#) we do recognize that there is institutional bias in many parts of society, including criminal justice. Ensuring that people are treated fairly and equally regardless of their demographic is something we should work toward. This study will, hopefully, start to move us away from rhetoric and attacks and toward finding common goals.

The study also points out, very clearly, the **prevalence of mental health issues** as a factor in uses of deadly force. Here is a [link](#) to an article this week about departments that have developed policies where they have chosen to not respond to certain suicide calls, in order to prevent *suicide by cop* outcomes. This is something that a few of us have discussed but now there are departments that have adopted this strategy.

Speaking of reducing community trust, further dividing, and using law enforcement as a political football, you may have seen this week that some presidential candidates cited the five year mark of the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson and **used the word “murder”**. As has been pointed out frequently, this is contradicted clearly by a comprehensive Dept. of Justice Investigation. The encouraging outcome of these inflammatory and false Tweets, however, was that even the [Washington Post](#) (!) felt compelled to call them on it.

Finally, here is a story from the [Kitsap Sun](#) about what we all know law enforcement officers do every day, and without wishing to draw attention to it.

You will also note that in this article, while the public narrative continues to focus on resources and minimizing the actions of suspects, while ignoring victims, this story is about the victims of those who use drugs and endanger the public. This family has been turned upside down by the choices and actions of an addict, and gives us a too-rare look into what public safety really means. This is why we do what we do...

Have a great weekend-

Work Hard- Have Fun- Stay Safe

Steven D. Strachan, Executive Director
Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs
3060 Willamette Drive NE
Lacey, WA 98516
steve@waspc.org
360-486-2380