

EVERY OFFICER. EVERY DAY.

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26

LEGISLATIVE SESSION SUMMARY



WASHINGTON
COUNCIL *of*
POLICE &
SHERIFFS

Stacy Roark, Government Relations Committee Chair
Teresa Taylor, Executive Director
Jeff DeVere, Contract Lobbyist



Your WACOPS Government Relations Committee Team

The WACOPS Government Relations Committee (GRC) is the body responsible for directing WACOPS' legislative advocacy strategy. Composed of the Executive Director, President, Contract Lobbyist, and Executive Board members, the GRC monitors legislation, develops WACOPS' positions on bills affecting Washington's peace officers, coordinates testimony and lawmaker outreach, and guides the organization's engagement with state and federal policymakers throughout the year.

Simply put: WACOPS GRC is your direct line between what happens in Olympia and what happens on the job.



Stacy Roark
GRC Chair



Teresa Taylor
Executive Director



Jeff DeVere
Contract Lobbyist



Chris Tracy
President



Tony Leonetti
Exec Board Pos. 3



Kevin Richey
Exec Board Pos. 5



Dear Members,

Now that the 2026 legislative session has ended, we're reaching out to share a recap of what we accomplished - and what we fought against - on your behalf this year.

This session followed a familiar pattern of the legislature choosing political convenience over the safety and well-being of the officers who put their lives on the line to protect Washington's communities. As we've seen in years past, several bills were passed that burden local officers for problems they didn't create. Reasonable, cost-free reforms that would have addressed our worst-in-the-nation staffing crisis were blocked for no good reason. And the Governor signed legislation into law that will make our jobs of stopping and solving crime harder. Through it all, your WACOPS GRC team fought back at every step: testifying, negotiating, securing amendments, and taking the concerns of our members directly to the Governor. That fight continues.

As you all know too well, Washington continues to face the worst law enforcement staffing crisis in the nation - ranking 51st in officers per capita for 15 years running. That is not a blip or a trend. It is a systemic failure, and it is only getting worse. Our communities are less safe because of it, and the officers who continue to serve are being stretched beyond what any workforce can sustain. Against that backdrop, it is nothing short of inexcusable that this legislature could not find the will to pass reasonable, no-cost bills that would have made the state a more viable place to build a career in law enforcement. Instead, lawmakers spent much of this session targeting local officers for the actions of federal agents, weakening public trust in law enforcement, limiting the tools investigators need to solve crimes, and sweeping billions from a pension fund that officers built their retirements around.

*"The 2026 session concluded March 12 after 60 days of lawmaking, with Democrats holding firm majorities in both the Senate and House as legislators tackled a projected **\$2 billion budget shortfall**. The resulting \$79.4B supplemental budget was balanced through a combination of rainy-day fund draws, targeted cuts, and new revenue measures including a historic millionaire tax. Roughly **4,000 bills were introduced** across both years of the biennium, with just over 700 passing both chambers. With the session now adjourned until January 2027, attention turns to November, when all 98 House seats and 25 Senate seats will be on the ballot."*

-Jeff DeVere, Contract Lobbyist

Nevertheless, we continued to fight and win on your behalf. In total, we tracked 134 bills, took formal positions on 26, testified on 13, and helped defeat or significantly amend 5 opposed bills. And when session came to a close, our work didn't stop. We took our remaining concerns directly to Governor Ferguson, formally requesting vetoes of five bills that impose unwarranted burdens on Washington's officers. This drew a line in the sand on the issues we care about most and will set the stage for any future legislation we introduce or advocate for to help fix these bills.



Lastly, our Board made a direct investment this year to best represent WACOPS' members: engaging one of the country's top public affairs firms, Fiona Hutton & Associates (FHA), to support our advocacy with a strategic communications program. FHA has a decade of experience working with our counterparts in California, PORAC, and has deep expertise in strengthening and amplifying the voice of law enforcement to advance real change both at the state and national level. Our decision to partner with FHA reflects our deep commitment to advancing your rights and benefits. Their team is bringing battle-tested strategy to our organization to professionalize our efforts and make a clear impact. We are thrilled with how they have embedded with our team to date and are excited to continue this partnership to bolster our voice in Olympia and beyond.

The following is a summary of our collective efforts to advocate for the rights and benefits of Washington's public safety professionals.

Representing WACOPS at the Capitol: Annual Day on the Hill



*WACOPS Members Advocating
at the Capitol*

Our presence in Olympia is never limited to just the GRC – but relies on the engagement of our members to show our elected leaders that we are actively advocating as a unified voice on the issues that matter most to Washington's peace officers. This session, we were proud to bring our members directly to the Capitol for our Day on the Hill, where 30 member organizations from across the state met face-to-face with lawmakers for 40 meetings to share their firsthand experiences and make the case for Washington's law enforcement community.

These conversations aren't always easy, and progress doesn't happen in a single meeting – but showing up matters. Our members brought honesty, real experiences from the job, and a genuine commitment to advocating for their fellow officers, their families and our profession as a whole. That kind of direct engagement from the people who actually wear the badge strengthens everything else we do in Olympia. We are grateful to every member who made the trip and encourage each of you to participate at our next event.

WACOPS' Priority Bill: HB 2220 – Recruitment & Retention

One of two WACOPS request bills was [HB 2220](#), the Washington Peace Officer Recruitment & Retention Bill. Developed in direct partnership with Prime Sponsor Rep. Mari Leavitt (D-University Place), we [introduced](#) the bill on National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day with support from FHA who developed a [fact sheet](#) and media strategy that explained the issue clearly to lawmakers, reporters, and the public.

HB 2220 was developed to correct a specific and documented injustice. Senate Bill 5051 (2021) restructured the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) in ways that made Washington police an outlier among licensed professions: today, a peace officer in this state can face career-ending decertification under a lower standard of proof than is required to discipline a teacher, sanction a lawyer, or revoke a doctor's license. No other licensed profession in Washington is held to such a tilted standard – and the impact is real. Officers know it. Recruits know it. And it is contributing directly to the staffing crisis that is making our state less safe. HB 2220 would help fix that by restoring the “clear and convincing” evidence standard for officer decertification, rebalancing decertification panels to include law enforcement professionals, and authorizing the CJTC to collect officer training records to support uniform statewide training.

“*Accountability and objectiveness must go hand-in-hand to build community trust and retain professionals in public safety. Adjusting to an appropriate standard of proof and balanced decision-making will help us keep good officers on the job and encourage new applicants to join the profession. By enduring folks are getting required training, it helps to build community trust. That's how we create a better, safer Washington for everyone.*”

- Representative Mari Leavitt, Prime Sponsor of HB 2220

The bill advanced out of the House Community Safety Committee – a meaningful milestone that reflects genuine legislative momentum and bipartisan recognition of the depth of our state's staffing crisis. However, it did not advance to a final vote – a failure that belongs entirely to a legislature that had the opportunity to take a no-cost step toward addressing the worst staffing crisis in our nation and chose not to. Nevertheless, we've laid critical groundwork in educating elected officials and the media on why this reform is necessary – important initial headway that will serve us well when we reintroduce this bill next session.



WACOPS Executive Director Teresa Taylor Testifying on HB 2220



Restoring Appropriate Use of Force Standards: HB 2541

WACOPS also sponsored [HB 2541](#), the Peace Officer Use of Force Standards Bill, carried by Prime Sponsor Rep. David Hackney (D-Tukwila). FHA supported the bill's introduction with [materials](#) to explain the details and necessity of this legislation to members and the media. This legislation sought to restore the U.S. Supreme Court's *Graham v. Connor* "objective reasonableness" standard to Washington state law – a standard that has governed use-of-force evaluation in every other state in the country since 1989, and that this legislature replaced in 2021 with language so vague that no one – not officers, not trainers, not agencies – can say with confidence what it requires. That ambiguity impacts how officers are trained, how they make decisions in the field, and how their actions are evaluated after the fact. For those reasons, it also makes Washington a less attractive place to serve, worsening our staffing crisis.

“*When standards are vague or open to broad interpretation, it undermines safety and trust. By aligning Washington law with the well-established framework used nationwide and reinforced by our judicial system, we provide officers with the guidance they need to make sound decisions.*”

- Representative David Hackney, Prime Sponsor of HB 2541

HB 2541 was a cost-free correction that asked nothing of the legislature except the willingness to give officers a clear, fair standard to work from. It was blocked anyway – a direct casualty of a political climate that made it impossible to have a rational conversation about the tools officers need to do their jobs safely. We remain committed to this reform, and will continue to build support for clear, consistent use-of-force standards that protect both officers and the communities they serve.

Masking Bill: SB 5855 - Face Coverings by Law Enforcement

One of the most politically charged bills this session was [SB 5855](#), which sought to restrict the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers. This legislation was driven by the emotionally charged national immigration enforcement debate. SB 5855 was a political stunt dressed up as accountability for local officers who had absolutely nothing to do with the federal actions that prompted it. Washington's local and state officers are already prohibited by state law from engaging in civil immigration enforcement and already wear identification, yet this legislature decided that the appropriate response to public anxiety about federal agents was to create new burdens and new liability exposure for those policing your neighborhoods. It is scapegoating – plain and simple – and our members deserve better.

WACOPS partnered with the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) to issue a [joint statement](#) to media and legislative contacts statewide reiterating the distinction between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement, defending the professionalism of our officers, and calling on elected officials to be honest with their constituents about what this bill would do.



WACOPS Contract Lobbyist Jeff DeVere Testifying on SB 5855

As the bill moved forward, we secured meaningful amendments: the removal of inflammatory intent language, elimination of civil liability exposure for officers complying with identification requirements, an expanded helmet exemption, and explicit PPE protections consistent with OSHA and WISHA requirements. The original bill also included language smearing local officers – which we had removed.

“Preserving public trust requires professionalism, transparency, and accountability – and is a mission that law enforcement cannot accomplish on our own. Public officials hold a critical role in de-escalating tensions by using measured, responsible rhetoric that reinforces lawful processes, the rule of law, and denounces violence, including violence against and interference with any law enforcement officers.”

- Teresa Taylor, Executive Director,
WACOPS

Even after this bill passed through the legislature, we kept fighting. We called on Governor Ferguson [directly](#), laying out how this legislation will change nothing about how federal agents operate and only serve to further stall recruitment efforts and accelerate the retention crisis. When the Governor unfortunately still signed the bill into law, we did not let up. We worked with FHA to draft and [publish a public statement](#) making clear that officers deserve better from state leaders and that the public deserves to know that this law will not deliver the protection it promises. While we are deeply disappointed that once again politics prevailed over facts, we are proud of how WACOPS engaged in good faith throughout this legislative session. We will closely monitor this bill's implementation and push for corrections next session.



WACOPS Advocacy Recap: Having Your Back in the Legislature

Beyond our priority bills, your WACOPS team was engaged in a broad range of legislation affecting your daily work, benefits, and due process rights. A few highlights:

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| <p>HB 2441</p> | <p>Supported medical insurance premium reimbursements for surviving spouses of officers killed in the line of duty. Thanks to the collective effort of the LEOFF 2 Board, the State Council of Fire Fighters, and WACOPS, this bill passed and has been signed into law.</p> | <p>Signed Into Law</p> |
| <p>HB 2644</p> | <p>Monitored and engaged on body-worn camera legislation, ensuring officer privacy interests, operational impacts, and practical implementation were part of the conversation.</p> | <p>Did Not Pass</p> |
| <p>HB 2333</p> | <p>This bill expanded legal protections against doxxing and targeted harassment for elected officials and prosecutors - and explicitly left law enforcement out. Officers and their families face these threats constantly, so we partnered with WASPC in a joint letter pushing back hard on that omission.</p> | <p>Did Not Pass</p> |
| <p>SB 6324</p> | <p>Supported legislation to include standby pay as basic salary in LEOFF 2 - a meaningful retirement security improvement. While this bill did not advance this year due to the challenging budget deficit, we expect this to be reintroduced next session - where we will be at the ready to support again.</p> | <p>Did Not Pass</p> |



Veto Requests

When our concerns on key legislation were not addressed during the session, we did not simply accept outcomes that were wrong for Washington’s officers and public safety. To continue the fight, WACOPS sent a [formal veto request letter](#) to Governor Ferguson, outlining our concerns with five bills passed this session: SSB 5855, ESSB 5925, key sections of ESSB 6002 and 2SSB 5974, and E2SHB 2034. In each case, we engaged in good faith throughout the legislative process, secured improvements where we could, and then made clear to the Governor and his policy team what still needed to be done. That kind of persistent, multi-front advocacy – at the committee table, on the floor, and at the Governor’s desk – is what you deserve from your advocacy organization.

Despite the Governor choosing not to grant these veto requests, we will be back next session to push for amendments to each of these bills to make things right.

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| <p>SB 5925</p> | <p>WACOPS strongly opposed this bill, and pulled the expertise of our retained law firm, Public Safety Labor Group, to fight with us by providing our testimony on the precarious legal authority the bill grants the AG. SB 5925 authorizes the Attorney General’s Office to issue civil investigative demands without meeting any burden of proof and imposed gag-order type restrictions on recipients – an unacceptable expansion of unchecked governmental authority. We formally requested the Governor stand with our members and veto this bill. He, again, did not, and we will be watching its implementation closely to fight for accountability.</p> | <p>Signed Into Law</p> |
| <p>SB 6002</p> | <p>This bill restricted law enforcement access to automated license plate reader data in ways that will make it harder to solve crimes and bring justice to victims. We fought hard to implement meaningful amendments – extending law enforcement access to ALPR data from the bill’s original 72-hour window to 21 days, adding the ability to search by vehicle characteristics, and expanding the authorized use of ALPR data to include gross misdemeanors – not just felonies or specifically identified crimes. Even with those improvements, the 21-day retention limit and one-sided civil liability provisions were deeply problematic. As such, we formally requested the Governor veto those sections.</p> | <p>Signed Into Law</p> |



SB 5974

**Law
Enforcement
Leaders**

We made clear that WACOPS supports implementing experience and certification requirements for appointed law enforcement leaders, while raising our concerns about provisions that would allow removal of elected sheriffs without voter input – a position that we raised to the media, resulting in WACOPS being quoted in coverage by [KUOW](#). We also successfully restored an officer’s right to review their own background file held by the CJTC. Unfortunately, the bill passed with problematic sections intact, and WACOPS [formally requested](#) the Governor veto them to avoid undermining the state’s democratic process for electing sheriffs. While the Governor again ignored our requests, we want to be clear that our fight is far from over: there are multiple legal challenges to this law currently underway, and WACOPS will be closely engaged in the process to ensure justice and fairness in our democratic process.

Signed Into Law

HB 2034

LEOFF 1

The legislature swept over \$3 billion from the LEOFF 1 pension surplus into the general fund - dollars that public safety professionals have built their retirements on. The Washington Supreme Court recognizes those benefits as constitutionally protected, yet the legislature raided the fund anyway to paper over a budget deficit. We engaged to protect the interests of LEOFF 1 members and the integrity of their earned benefits, including [formally requesting](#) the Governor veto this legislation.

Signed Into Law





Beyond the Legislature: Advocating at Every Level

WACOPS' work on your behalf doesn't stop at the Capitol steps. Throughout the year, we actively engaged on critical issues at both the state and federal level - communicating directly with government leaders, oversight bodies, and national partners to protect officer interests and advance policies that support the profession:

- **Federal Advocacy:** Through our work with the West Coast Law Enforcement Coalition and the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA), WACOPS has been actively engaged at the federal level - bringing the concerns of our members directly to Congress and the White House. This year, that included advocacy around Medicare benefits expansion, on-site childcare grant funding for law enforcement agencies, federal funding and resources for recruitment and retention efforts, protecting qualified immunity for officers nationwide, and broader criminal justice reforms to hold repeat offenders to account. These efforts reflect our belief that meaningful change for our members requires engagement at every level of government, and that Washington's officers deserve advocates who show up wherever these decisions are being made.
- **Office of Independent Investigations:** In February, we [sent a letter](#) directly to the Governor urging the appointment of a new permanent Director of the Office of Independent Investigations (OII) who demonstrates independence, sound judgment, and a meaningful understanding of law enforcement realities. OII has significant authority over officers' careers and livelihoods, and its credibility and integrity depends on leadership that is committed to objectivity, not ideology. We will continue to monitor this office closely to remain engaged on this issue and ensure that the next person chosen to lead it is qualified to do so and committed to public safety.
- **Washington State Use-of-Force Data:** Ahead of the Washington State Data Exchange for Public Safety (WADEPS) publishing its inaugural statewide police use-of-force database, WACOPS coordinated directly with WADEPS so we understood what the data would entail and could respond thoughtfully from day one. When the database went live, WACOPS was the first to respond publicly. Our [public response](#), which was covered by the [The Center Square](#), applauded the transparency effort while cautioning against premature conclusions before experts complete their full analysis. We remain engaged with WADEPS as this data continues to develop and will ensure the law enforcement perspective is part of any policy conversation it informs.

These engagements reflect what WACOPS does year-round: show up, speak clearly, and make sure the law enforcement perspective is represented wherever decisions are being made that affect you, your families, and the safety of all Washington residents.



Looking Ahead

Washington's peace officers are being failed by the systems that are supposed to support them. The irrefutable staffing crisis is the accumulated result of policy decisions that have made this profession harder to enter, harder to stay in, and harder to do with confidence. Officers are being held to vague legal standards, evaluated by untrained civilian panels, stripped of investigative tools, and burdened for the actions of agencies that aren't even subject to state law. Too often, when WACOPS has brought reasonable, evidence-based solutions to Olympia, the response has been indifference or obstruction dressed up as reform. That is not acceptable, and we intend to keep saying so: loudly, persistently, and on the record.

That said, we have never believed that advocacy means opposition for its own sake. We are most effective when we are at the table, building relationships, finding common ground, and working with stakeholders who are genuinely committed to public safety outcomes. That spirit of collaboration is how we advanced HB 2220 out of committee, how we secured meaningful amendments on bills that could have been far worse, and how we will continue to build the relationships that move the needle for our members over the long term. WACOPS stands ready to work with any legislator, on either side of the aisle, who shares our commitment to a safer Washington.

The challenges facing Washington's peace officers are not going away. And when legislation targets our members unfairly, we will say so publicly and unapologetically. When we are back in Olympia next session, we will bring the same urgency we brought this year – fighting for your safety, your benefits, your due process rights, and your ability to do the job that Washington's communities need you to do.

Thank you for your continued trust and investment in our shared work. We hope to see many of you at our upcoming General Membership Meeting. And if you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us at any time.

With gratitude,

The WACOPS GRC Committee

EVERY OFFICER. EVERY DAY.

ABOUT WACOPS

The Washington Council of Police & Sheriffs (WACOPS) is recognized as the largest, oldest, and most influential organization representing law enforcement professionals in Washington State. We are committed to protecting the rights and quality of life of law enforcement officers through legislative action, legal defense, and the provision of quality long-term disability, life, and other insurance products. WACOPS membership is made up of law enforcement guilds from across the state. The more agencies involved, the stronger voice we have.



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