

WASHINGTON'S PEACE OFFICER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION BILL

Prioritizing Accountability and Fairness in Police Oversight to Address Washington's Law Enforcement Staffing Crisis

Law enforcement in Washington State is held to high standards in training and performance. The officer certification system—administered by the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC)—is essential to this accountability and must be trusted by both the public and commissioned officers. But today, that review process is imbalanced, hindering recruitment efforts and driving experienced officers out of the profession. That is why WACOPS is proud to request HB 2220, legislation that makes targeted, no-cost improvements to support officer recruitment and retention while maintaining accountability.

WHAT WENT WRONG: CRITICAL CHANGES MADE TO THE CJTC

In 2021, Senate Bill 5051 (Chapter 323, Laws of 2021) made significant changes to the CJTC. While Washington's peace officers welcomed many positive reforms, certain provisions have negatively impacted the profession.

- **COMMISSION COMPOSITION**

Diluted law enforcement representation to 6 of 21, reducing professional expertise in critical decision making.

- **DECERTIFICATION PANEL MAKEUP**

Reduced law enforcement members from 3 to 2 on this 5-member panel, putting professional experience in the minority.

- **BURDEN OF PROOF**

Lowered the decertification standard from “clear and convincing” to “preponderance of the evidence”—reducing the appropriate level of proof that should be necessary in career-defining decisions.



No other licensed vocation in Washington—including lawyers, doctors, and teachers—has less representation or such a low burden of proof for decertification decisions as law enforcement.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Imbalanced decision-making and an insufficient standard of proof have created uncertainty and distrust about how decertification decisions are made. This uncertainty and distrust undermines departments' ability to recruit and retain a suitable workforce—deepening Washington's historic officer staffing crisis which has already stretched departments thin and put public safety at risk.

Washington state **has ranked last** in law enforcement staffing nationwide for 15 years straight:

51st

in officers per capita
(behind all 50 states and D.C.)

WASHINGTON STATE

1.36

officers per 1,000
residents

NATIONAL AVERAGE

3.5

officers per 1,000
residents

vs

THE SOLUTION: HB 2220

HB 2220 supports holding officers to account, recognizes the significance of a decertification hearing, honors a professional and objectively fair process, and upholds officer due process rights consistent with other licensed professions.

KEY FIXES



RESTORES APPROPRIATE STANDARD OF PROOF

Promotes evidence-based decision-making by returning to a “clear and convincing” evidence standard—consistent with doctors, lawyers, and other professional boards.



BOLSTERS TRAINING & OVERSIGHT

Authorizes the CJTC to collect officer training records to create a uniform statewide system to track training completion and create clear reporting processes to enhance transparency.



BALANCES CERTIFICATION PANELS

Adjusts to 3 law enforcement professionals and 3 community members—preserving public voice while ensuring professional experience is included in career impacting decision making.

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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 ensuring folks are getting required training, it helps to build community trust. That's how we create a better, safer Washington for everyone.”

- Rep. Mari Leavitt, Prime Sponsor of HB 2220



Safety is a basic right that every resident deserves. WACOPS has a proven track record of collaborating with the legislature and the public to develop reforms to protect public safety—HB 2220 offers a cost-free, smart governance solution that is an essential next step in improving community policing, prioritizing accountability, and addressing the rampant staffing shortages facing our state.