WASHINGTON COUNCIL
OF POLICE & SHERIFFS

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POLICY PLATFORM

Every Officer. Every Day.

CONTACT US (360) 352-8224 wacops@wacops.org 200 Union Ave S.E., Olympia, WA 98501

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This policy platform sets out the principles that guide the Washington Council of Police & Sheriffs (WACOPS) advocacy and the direction our state must take on the issues facing law enforcement to create a healthy, safe state for all. It is written for lawmakers, community leaders, and partners and informed by firsthand, on-the-ground experience of active-duty peace officers and law enforcement experts who serve their communities every day.

WACOPS is the state's largest and most influential organization representing law enforcement professionals. Since 1962, we have advocated in Olympia, and more recently in Washington D.C., on behalf of our 6,000-plus active-duty peace officer members represented by over 100 labor organizations. We are peace officer labor unified and magnified — the credible, firsthand voice on the issues that define our profession: staffing and training, pension and benefits, collective bargaining rights, and officer safety.

Public safety is the foundation of a healthy society. Families have to feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods. When public safety is strong, everything else a community wants to build becomes possible — and when it fails, everyone pays the price.

Today, Washington faces the most severe law enforcement staffing crisis in the nation, ranking 51st in officers per capita for fifteen consecutive years. Fewer officers are being asked to shoulder more, while the consequences of recent reforms continue to drive experienced officers away and discourage new recruits. That puts the public at risk and exposes officers to more calls per shift, greater trauma and personal risk, and less time to recover.

Solving this staffing crisis will require sustained support and collaboration from elected officials, community groups, and the partnership of law enforcement labor and management.

WACOPS has a proven record of being part of that broader conversation — supporting appropriate reform where it improves the profession and opposing proposals that weaken it. We are ready to collaborate with anyone serious about strengthening the profession and improving outcomes for Washington's communities.



WACOPS Supports

- A collaborative, bipartisan approach that treats officers as critical partners and subject-matter experts in shaping public safety policy.
- Evidence-based policymaking that draws on data and the on-the-ground perspective of those who do the work.
- Protect and improve labor rights, transparent, and fair due process rights, and top-notch benefits for Washington law enforcement.
- Respect for local control, recognizing that what works in one Washington community may fall short in another.

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DRIVING RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

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Stable, long-term funding to recruit, hire, train, and retain officers is the foundation of effective public safety. When departments are fully staffed, response times improve, community engagement deepens, and crime is more effectively deterred; when they are not, the remaining officers absorb the strain, proactive policing gives way to reactive coverage, and public safety suffers. **Rebuilding Washington's law enforcement workforce is a direct investment in the safety and stability of every community in the state.**

THE CHALLENGE:

Washington is not recruiting and retaining enough officers to keep pace. The state has ranked 51st in the nation in officers per capita — behind all 50 states and D.C. — for fifteen straight years, and added just 68 officers in 2025, growth outpaced by the state's population. At roughly 1.37 officers per 1,000 residents, less than half the national average, departments cannot provide the level of service and safety the public expects and deserves. Smaller and rural agencies are hit hardest, lacking the resources to compete on pay and benefits.

THE SOLUTION:

Reversing this trend takes both words and resources. Public officials must speak about the profession as the secure, respected career it is — when leaders reinforce negative perceptions of policing, they deepen this crisis. But improved rhetoric is not enough. Washington needs sustained funding that allows departments of every size to compete for and keep qualified officers, paired with tangible benefits and practical reforms that remove barriers to entering and staying in the profession.

WACOPS Supports

- **Elected officials actively promoting law enforcement** as honorable and essential public servants holding critical, difficult jobs that many would not, and could not, do themselves.
- **Holistic assessment of layers of external review** informed by law enforcement to ensure fair, consistent accountability with due process and appeal rights for officers without redundant bureaucracy.
- **Modern incentives,** including housing assistance, childcare, mental and physical wellbeing support, retiree medical, and retention bonuses for experienced officers.
- **Sustained, meaningful funding** for departments statewide, to cover the costs of the State's Basic Law Enforcement Academy and all mandated training, including Advanced Training.



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STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING & LABOR RIGHTS

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Every WACOPS member is enrolled in their local bargaining unit, and protecting their labor rights is core to our mission. Strong collective bargaining ensures that officers have fair wages, safe working conditions, and meaningful due process — the same rights afforded to workers across the public and private sectors. WACOPS has helped secure major gains for Washington's officers, including extending interest arbitration to all fully commissioned peace officer labor organizations regardless of jurisdiction size or structure. Maintaining and strengthening these rights — while ensuring any changes are informed by law enforcement — elevates professionalism, brings stability to the job, and positions Washington as a place officers want to live and work. This is directly tied to staffing: diminishing these rights would make Washington's hiring crisis worse, while strengthening them is one of the most effective ways to keep experienced officers on the job and bring new ones in.

THE CHALLENGE:

Washington has historically been a good home for labor, and a strong bipartisan majority supports the right to organize. However, lately law enforcement has been singled out in proposed legislation to carve out of protections other workers would retain. This sends a negative signal to the profession, even if the legislation fails. Collective bargaining has served as a critical check in Washington — without it, many of the policies coming out of Olympia would have driven the staffing crisis even deeper. When officers lose their voice on staffing, safety, scheduling, and discipline, both the profession and the communities we serve pay the price.

THE SOLUTION:

The answer is to defend what officers have earned and resist efforts to chip away at it. Bargaining rights, including interest arbitration for all commissioned officers, must be preserved, protected, and strengthened, not carved out or diminished. **No public employee should be at risk of losing arbitration rights, including arbitration in disciplinary matters.** Carve-outs targeting law enforcement set a dangerous precedent that puts every public employee's protections at risk. Any change to the rules that govern this work should be informed by law enforcement, and WACOPS will continue to oppose any attempt to weaken them.



WACOPS Supports

- **Protecting and strengthening** peace officers' right to organize and bargain collectively.
- **Preserving full interest arbitration and equitable bargaining rights** for all commissioned officers statewide, free of carve-outs.
- **Bolstering transparent and fair due process rights** for officers during administrative investigations to ensure confidentiality, privacy protections, and consistent disciplinary processes are maintained to support positive employer-employee relationships within departments.
- **Ensuring officers retain a real voice** in workplace policies through strong labor rights.

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ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL & BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST

WASHINGTON COUNCIL of POLICE & SHERIFFS

WACOPS supports officer accountability. **Our members are in a constant state of retraining and improvement, and we embrace every opportunity to get better at how we serve — because the officers who do this work want to be trusted by their communities and know that trust is earned.** We engage constructively with the State's oversight structures, and we expect that they be fair, well-resourced, and officer-informed.

THE CHALLENGE:

Accountability and effectiveness have to be kept in balance. Standards that are vague or applied in hindsight make officers hesitate in the fast-moving, high-stakes moments that demand sound, split-second judgment. The balance tips further the wrong way when policy is driven by assumption or politics rather than evidence. When evidence is lacking, officers are negatively targeted for doing their jobs and the trust these systems are meant to build is eroded.

THE SOLUTION:

Accountability works best when it is clear, fair, and grounded in evidence. Officers need objective, well-understood standards they can train to and trust, and oversight bodies that are properly resourced and informed by law enforcement experience. The data should anchor the conversation: Washington's WADEPS database, a first-in-the-nation transparency tool, confirms that reportable use of force is exceptionally rare and overwhelmingly resolved without serious harm. Building policy on that record strengthens trust and keeps good officers on the job.



WACOPS Supports

- **Statistically sound use-of-force data** collection that guides policy with evidence, not assumption.
- **A clear, objective standard** of judgment and procedural protections that keep good officers on the job.
- **Transparency and accountability** measures that build community trust without preventing officers from doing their jobs safely.
- **Independent review processes** that are fair, well-resourced, and informed by law enforcement experience.

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EQUIPPING & TRAINING OFFICERS TO SUCCEED

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Modern policing asks officers to make sound decisions under extreme pressure, often in seconds and in situations that change by the moment. Meeting that challenge takes rigorous, ongoing training and up-to-date tools that keep pace as the work evolves. Washington rightly holds its officers to high standards, and WACOPS embraces that expectation — but a standard is only meaningful if officers are actually given the relevant training, time, and resources to meet it.

THE CHALLENGE:

Today, support for officers is falling short. The State Auditor has found that only a small fraction of new and veteran officers have completed the continuing education mandated under state law, not for lack of will, but because agencies lack the funding and staff to cover both the direct cost of training and the hours officers must spend off patrol. The state's training mandate currently collides head-on with the staffing crisis and becomes an unfunded burden on departments least able to absorb it.

THE SOLUTION:

Washington must close the gap between the standards it sets and the support it provides to meet them. That means fully funding both initial and continuing training so mandates do not become unfunded burdens, and reforming and resourcing the state's training commission so it can clear backlogs and deliver courses on time. **Aligning Washington with sound, consistent national training and use-of-force standards, and thoughtfully adopting modern technology that supports officers rather than replaces them, will keep the profession sharp as the work continues to evolve.**



WACOPS Supports

- **Alignment with sound, consistent national training** and use-of-force standards grounded in constitutional principles.
- **Fully funded initial and continuing training,** so mandates do not become unfunded burdens that worsen staffing shortfalls.
- **Access to modern equipment** and emerging technology, with appropriate safeguards, plus continued professional development and training.
- **Reform and provide adequate resourcing for the state's training pipelines,** including the development of new training avenues and venues — like through partnerships with community colleges — to clear backlogs and improve delivery.

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PROTECTING & ENHANCING OFFICER RETIREMENT BENEFITS

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Police work takes a toll that few other professions demand: long and unpredictable hours, physical danger, and repeated exposure to stress and trauma that follow officers beyond their shift. Washington has recognized that reality, building one of the strongest pension systems in the country and setting retirement eligibility at 53. These are promises made over full careers of service, and honoring them is what allows the state to attract and keep the professionals our communities depend on. That matters now more than ever: with Washington 51st in the nation in officers per capita, a strong pension is one of the few advantages the state still has in competing for officers. Weakening this asset would only serve to deepen the staffing crisis.

THE CHALLENGE:

Those promises are only as good as the commitment to keep them. Recent legislative action removed more than $3 billion from LEOFF Plan 1, heightening concerns among officers who have spent their careers paying into Plan 2. The plans are distinct, but the precedent is not, and pensions are not a slush fund to be raided when the legislature wants money elsewhere. Early retirement rings hollow when officers who retire at the state-approved age of 53 face years without affordable health care before Medicare, a gap that forces many to weigh their health against their finances and continue working beyond the age of retirement. And for officers whose careers end in injury, current disability benefits fail to account for the pension contributions they won't get to make — a shortfall that follows officers for life.

THE SOLUTION:

Protecting what officers have earned and closing the gaps that remain go hand in hand. **LEOFF Plan 2 must be safeguarded against any precedent that treats it as a funding source for unrelated priorities.** Disability protections must be evaluated and designed to keep officers financially protected after the job has broken them, and affordable post-retirement health care must be prioritized. Recent federal changes have made progress, but more is needed to bridge the years before Medicare eligibility and make supplemental coverage affordable for early retirees.



WACOPS Supports

- **Protecting LEOFF Plan 2 and safeguarding all earned pension benefits** against funding shifts or precedents that put them at risk.
- **Treating dedicated pension funds as off-limits** for unrelated spending, regardless of which plan or budget cycle.
- **Strong disability benefits** that reflect the full cost of a career-ending injury — both the income lost and the pension contributions an officer will never get to earn.
- **Closing the gap between retirement and Medicare eligibility** — including affordable supplemental health insurance to bridge coverage for early retirees.

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OFFICERS AND THE COMMUNITY

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Public safety is built one relationship at a time. **Officers are members of the communities they serve and show up for their neighbors long after the shift ends. This instinct for service is what drew many of our officers to the profession in the first place, and this commitment and passion is one of law enforcement's greatest assets.** When departments and communities build on it intentionally with programs for officers and residents to know one another outside of emergencies, the result is strong relationships, greater trust, and safer neighborhoods.

THE CHALLENGE:

The programs that create these connections work, but too often they run on goodwill alone. Youth athletic leagues, mentorship programs, and partnerships that embed officers in local nonprofits consistently prove their value. Newer approaches show the same promise: some officers now carry community-funded debit cards to meet a neighbor's urgent needs on the spot — a tank of gas or groceries for a family in crisis — solving problems an arrest or citation never could. And to support our state's next generation, school resource officers serve as mentors and advocates for youth. Yet these programs stay under constant threat of funding cuts and remain scattered and dependent on whoever champions them locally. One thing is clear: Washington should not leave its best trust-building tools to chance.

THE SOLUTION:

Communities flourish when officers are given meaningful ways to invest in them. That means bolstering sustained support for programs that bring officers and residents together, increasing access to practical tools that let officers meet urgent needs in the moment, and treating school resource officers as a long-term investment so students keep a consistent, familiar presence that fosters long-term success. It also means building out co-responder models that pair officers with mental health professionals, adding expertise to the response without removing officers from it. Designed in collaboration with officers, these investments are among the most direct and cost-effective ways to strengthen trust and truly improve public safety for our communities.



WACOPS Supports

- **Sustained funding** for community mentorship and outreach programs that connect officers with young people.
- **Equipping officers with flexible resources** so they can provide immediate, practical help to neighbors in crisis.
- **Protecting the role of school resource officers,** who build trust with students, serve as mentors, and keep campuses safe.
- **Supporting co-response and partnership models** that pair officers with mental health and social-service professionals where appropriate.
- **Public engagement** that reflects and acknowledges the everyday, positive contributions of law enforcement in community life.

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CONCLUSION

Washington's public safety challenges took years to develop and will not be solved overnight. But they are solvable — if we work together.

WACOPS MAKES THIS COMMITMENT:

Regardless of party, position, or organization, if you have a genuine interest in improving the law enforcement profession and public safety outcomes for everyone, our door is open and we want to work with you.

The path forward runs through the priorities set out in this platform: rebuilding the workforce through sustained investment and a renewed commitment to the profession; protecting the collective bargaining and labor rights that officers deserve; supporting transparency and accountability through fair and objective practices grounded in evidence; equipping and training officers to meet Washington's high standards; safeguarding the pensions, benefits, and wellness that let officers serve and retire with dignity; and recognizing the everyday role officers play in the life of their communities. Progress on each depends on the same thing: partners willing to treat officers as part of the solution.

Our members are on the front line every day, giving them a firsthand understanding of what it takes to keep Washington safe — an understanding we are ready and willing to share. With practical solutions, sustained investment, and honest collaboration, we can rebuild the workforce, strengthen trust, and ensure every community has the support it needs. WACOPS will continue to be a credible, collaborative, and steadfast partner in that work, for every officer, every day.

CONTACT US

WACOPS welcomes the opportunity to work with lawmakers, community leaders, and partners across the public safety system.

To learn more or to start a conversation, contact us at (360) 352-8224 or wacops@wacops.org, or visit us at 200 Union Avenue S.E., Olympia, WA 98501. Learn more about our work at wacops.org.

