



During this last year the Mayor and I have met with numerous community members, citizens and business owners to talk about public safety. I have found a profound difference between what our citizens expect of Public Safety and what our legislators continue to do in Olympia. There is a serious disconnect. The legislature does not listen to the practitioners of law enforcement but continue with their theories and those theories are not working out well for our communities.

You have overwhelmingly made it clear you want safe neighborhoods and safe streets free of crime and drugs. I hear you and we at BPD are doing our best to make that happen within the laws of our State. You feel that you can not drive safely in Washington anymore and that your neighborhoods are filled with people who obviously need behavioral health or drug rehabilitation assistance, yet they are wandering your neighborhoods and effecting your businesses.

As an example of that divide, I have copied part of the WASPC (Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs) Update from retired Chief Strachan the executive director and someone who has continually brought communities together and been a voice of reason. If you want to read the entire letter and use the links go to www.waspc.org and read the Executive Directors Newsletter.



Here is what he shared in part:

We see some support for state funding for law enforcement, and recognition by Gov. Ferguson and others that our state needs more police. However, we also see more of the bills our legislature has attempted to pass the last few years: laws that seek to discourage or forbid the police from policing.

Here's a prime example: the "Traffic Safety for All" bill, HB 1512, sponsored by Rep. Chipalo Street (D-37) who states it will "reinforce the need for targeted enforcement... One of the things I'm hearing about public safety is that there's a layer of lawlessness in our society." Rep. Street emphasizes that the bill "would allow law enforcement officers to focus on infractions more closely tied to road safety, rather than spending time on issues like expired tabs or minor vehicle defects. He said, "If I use a crude example, if there were people walking down the street yielding machetes, I'd rather have our law enforcement officers addressing those folks with machetes, as opposed to writing tickets for parking violations."

The hearing in the House is found here with the bill itself starting at the 42 minute mark. Here is a story on the bill from KING 5, and here is another from KIRO Radio. Here are a few issues with this bill to note:

- Like so many others over the last few years, HB 1512 or "Traffic Safety for All" is another bill designed primarily to forbid or discourage the police from policing. It is based on contempt for the police, and like the other bills we have seen, will result in more contempt for the rule of law.



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

FEB. 21, 2025

- The insidious part of this bill, ostensibly to “help” the police by allowing them to focus on “real crime”, is that it sets up officers to fail. Why? The bill says officers cannot stop a vehicle for an equipment violation, unless the officer deems it to be an undefined “safety risk”. In other words, you need to predict the future. If an officer stops a vehicle as a "serious risk", they may be subject to civil lawsuits and arguments made by civil plaintiffs’ attorneys that it was not enough of a risk, and that they engaged in some sort of profiling, along with complaints to the Criminal Justice Training Commission with career-ending decertification as the threat. If an officer does not stop the vehicle and it causes a subsequent collision, they may be subject to civil lawsuits and arguments made by plaintiffs’ attorneys that the officer showed deliberate indifference and should be decertified. This does not match the stated intent of increasing the number of law enforcement officers in our state. It provides more reasons to choose not to work in law enforcement in our state.
- The intention of the bill is to make more traffic stops so legally fraught and cumbersome that they do not occur at all. Again- to discourage the police from policing. This is defunding by another means.
- This bill is great for civil plaintiffs’ attorneys, who get cases and fees, while the legal risk of being an officer continues to rise. Current and potential officers see it, and they see exactly what the advocates are doing. Funding is great, but officers need to see our elected leaders supporting them, not continually demonizing them.
- As vehicles become much safer through technologies like automatic emergency braking, more and better airbags, traction control, adaptive cruise control, blind spot monitoring and more, fatal crashes have, amazingly, increased 51% in our state since 2019. Remember that quaint notion of “Target Zero” a few years ago? Our cars are much safer, but fatalities are rising fast. Why? Too few officers, too few consequences, too many reasons to not initiate police contacts, and a sense of brazen disregard for the law. HB 1512 sends another message that laws are not really to be followed, and the police are the real problem. The New York Times looked at reduced traffic enforcement and its link to increased traffic deaths. The data in the article directly refutes the assertions made by the advocates- that less low-level enforcement means greater safety. Traffic deaths have risen when traffic stops declined, period.
- Finally, while this law is supposedly about reducing police interactions with the public, it exempts car tabs if they are twelve months past due. So, is this about safety, or revenue? If it’s about safety, then license tabs should be exempted completely, and any other violations which no longer be a primary reason for a stop should simply be removed from the books.



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Regarding HB 1512, a resident of Tacoma took the time to find my e-mail and sent me a copy of what she wrote to legislators. It expresses well how many would feel about this effort to make our state a better place to flout the law, and the ongoing frustration many feel with feeling like a chump for paying their taxes and following the rules.

She wrote: I strongly oppose this bill and am outraged that it's even being considered. If you drive a car in this state, you must be responsible for repairs, registration, and insurance. Allowing vehicles with broken taillights or expired tabs on the road is a safety hazard. I already see too many cars without plates - what's next? Eliminating the need for tabs or insurance altogether? I have lived in this state my entire life, and last year, I paid nearly \$1,000 for tabs on just one car, with a significant portion going to the RTA tax. And I'm a retiree! If people start driving without paying these fees, who will cover the costs? When drivers neglect essential repairs, who pays the price? The burden will undoubtedly fall on those of us who follow the rules. Responsible citizens should not have to foot the bill for those who refuse to be accountable. On top of that, this bill interferes with law enforcement by restricting their ability to pull drivers over for non-compliance. Why make it harder for police to do their job and keep our roads safe? To make matters worse, in 2024, one of our cars was rear-ended by an uninsured driver. It was their fault, yet we had to take full responsibility. This is exactly the kind of irresponsibility this bill encourages. I am tired of being taxed relentlessly while others get a free pass. Enough is enough! Passing this bill only rewards irresponsibility and punishes those who do the right thing.

If you are still reading, then I thank you for caring enough to spend the time learning about what is happening that directly effects your safety and community. I would ask that you begin telling your legislators what it is you expect and want from them. We hear you and are using the resources we have to best make that happen in our city. I will be expecting the Governor to roll out help for cities like ours. Cities that are greatly understaffed and lost numerous officers over the last several years. This was a campaign promise he made and I for one want to hold him to it.

We will continue to provide services abiding by the law and within the abilities we are afforded to protect and serve you with.

Sincerely,
Chief Tom Wolfe