

September 20, 2022

Dear 10th District Washington State Legislators
40th District Washington State Legislators
39th District Washington State Legislators:

We are writing you in advance of the upcoming legislative session with a continuing concern over crime in our Skagit County cities. Citizens across the state have been voicing their concerns with laws regarding vehicle pursuits by police, the impact of the *Blake* decision, new laws surrounding juvenile questioning and rising crime in general. In the four cities in Skagit county, we have seen the detrimental effects of increasing crime, drug abuse and an embolden criminal element that is making our communities less safe. Unless serious thoughtful action is taking at the State level, we believe public safety will continue to degrade for the over 75,000 people we four mayors represent.

Pursuits. RCW 10.116.060 has created many situations where criminals simply drive away from police when the lights and sirens go on, because they know the police will likely not be allowed to chase them. We all have examples of incidents that have jeopardized our cities due to a suspect knowingly fleeing and flaunting the pursuit laws, and evidentiary statements from suspects stating they know that police cannot pursue. We understand pursuits are inherently dangerous, however this law has not reduced the danger but rather has encouraged a certain criminal element to flee apprehension.

Drugs. One of the most effective tools for law enforcement was the fact that that certain drug possessions were class C felonies in Washington State. Most of the crimes in our cities stem from illicit drug use/abuse. Senate Bill 5476 essentially makes it legal to possess drugs and reduces the criminal penalty for possession of a controlled or counterfeit substance from a felony to a gross misdemeanor. A person must be stopped by police three times, two must be referrals to drug treatment and then the third contact becomes a possible misdemeanor. The referral system is flawed on many levels, either not established or impractical to accomplish. This occurring at the same time we were just starting to see the efficacy of therapeutic courts like Skagit County Community Court, Adult Drug Court, and Family Recovery Court, which are effective due to the subject having a potential trip to jail (for felony possession) for non-compliance to treatment orders.

Juveniles. HB 1140, that went into effect at the beginning of 2022, has substantially hamstrung the police with regards to juvenile questioning. Having to contact an attorney in the middle of a dangerous situation not only puts law officers in unnecessary jeopardy but the public as well. Gangs have always taken advantage of juveniles, and this is yet another opportunity to exploit juveniles into gang activities. All you need to do is read the news for one day, and you will sadly see teens involved in gang violence.

Jails. Jails play an important part of community safety. Sometimes jail can be the best alternative to change the trajectory of repeat law breakers. In Skagit County, our citizens, several years ago made a significant investment in building a new jail – a “Justice Center.” It is a model of progressive criminal justice reform, built with strong community tax support and hopes of significantly reducing recidivism. The center was designed with the capability to screen for mental health and substance abuse, often the

underpinning of repeat offenders. Unfortunately, with the dual timing of the police reform legislation, coupled with a pandemic, our Justice Center has yet to bear fruit that we know will come.

We mayors, and our populations, are proud of our police departments, the training they receive and respect they show for the rights of all our citizens while protecting and serving our cities. We are seeing the rights of most of our citizens being trampled by a few law breakers and our communities diminished. We are hearing loudly from our constituents that there must be course correction of the attempted police reforms put in place by the legislature. Our police departments have demonstrated how law enforcement can be proactive, have close relationships with all members of the communities regardless of background, and be an essential part of quality of life in our State.

We are grateful that you have spent time with our Skagit County Police Chiefs and Sheriff group and ask you to adopt reforms proposed in those discussions.

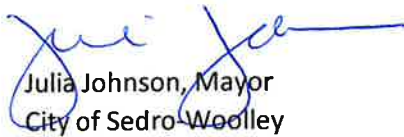
Respectfully,



Jill Boudreau, Mayor
City of Mount Vernon



Matt Miller, Mayor
City of Anacortes



Julia Johnson, Mayor
City of Sedro-Woolley



Steve Sexton, Mayor
City of Burlington