

Public safety

2025



Increase fiscal tools and resources to address public safety and criminal justice challenges.

Background:

Public safety is a core responsibility of city government. In fact, cities employ the most law enforcement officers in Washington. Our communities are safer places to live, learn, work, and play thanks to high-quality public safety services delivered by local law enforcement.

Cities are struggling to recruit and retain police officers. Additionally, community concerns about juvenile crime, drug offenses, gun violence, and property crime remain high, and these cases place ongoing strain on the criminal justice system.

Washington's police officer to population ratio has decreased.

For every 1,000 residents:

In 2000:



1.7
police officers

In 2023:



1.3
police officers

*By comparison, the national rate is **2.3** police officers per 1,000 residents.*

Communities need the criminal justice system to function effectively and have adequate resources for a vast array of services, including:

- Law enforcement
- Local courts
- Prosecutors
- Indigent defense
- Jails
- Treatment and diversion programs

Strong cities need:

- **Increased funding to meet local public safety needs**, including additional direct state funding via the the Municipal Criminal Justice Assistance Account.
- **Support for efforts to prevent and address juvenile crime**, including expansion of juvenile behavioral health treatment capacity and state correctional capacity.
- **Continued state funding** for 100% of Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) costs and to expand existing—and create new—regional BLEA academies.
- **Updates to the obsolete** Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC) main facility.
- **Support for additional programs to reduce gun violence** in our communities and enforce unlawful possession of firearms.
- **Support for programs designed to improve law enforcement retention**, such as state-supported law enforcement officer wellness and injury prevention programs.

Without a well-resourced system, we will continue to experience a revolving door in the criminal justice system that doesn't consistently address public safety issues and justice for victims, nor does it provide offenders with a pathway towards rehabilitation.

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Contact:

Candice Bock
Government Relations Director
candiceb@awcnet.org

Emma Shepard
Legislative Policy Analyst
emmas@awcnet.org

One-third of officers are near retirement

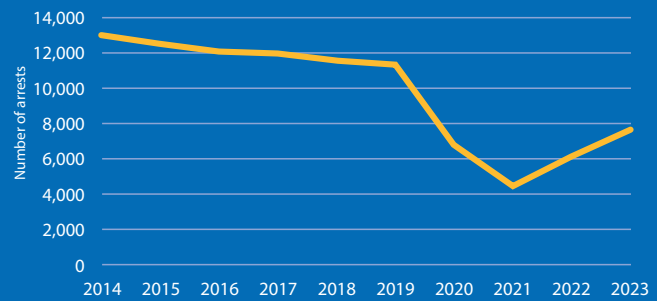


Source: Washington Dept. of Retirement Systems, 2023

Changes in drug possession laws following the *Blake* decision have led to an increase in drug-related charges, creating new demands on the criminal justice system. These charges are now misdemeanors, which puts a greater impact on the municipal criminal justice system. Communities are also concerned about a steep increase in juvenile crime coming out of the pandemic that is a worrisome trend for many reasons, but in particular because of the serious nature of the crimes being committed by our youth.

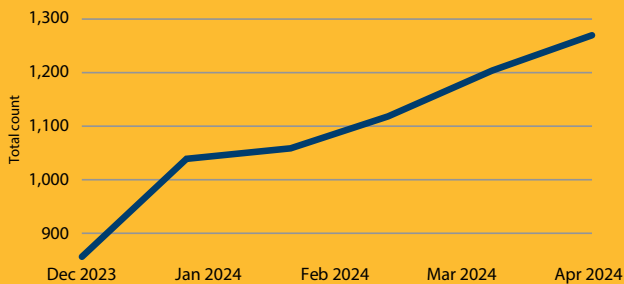
Retaining our peace officers is also an ongoing concern and an important aspect of meeting public safety needs. As a part of those efforts, we must continue to focus more resources on officer wellness and well-being to protect both their physical and mental health.

Juvenile arrests in Washington, 2014-2023



Source: WASPC's Crime in Washington Annual Reports, 2014-2023

Statewide drug possession and public use charges over a 6-month period



The number of charges increased by 49%

Source: Administrative Office of the Courts