



## **Rational Steps #5: Increase the Number of Law Enforcement Officers**

*Welcome to the fifth installment of my policy series, where we will identify and explore important issues facing our state and recommend workable policy solutions. It is my goal that this series be informative, educational, and an example of how to constructively take rational steps toward a better Washington for all.*

- **Issue:** Violent crime in Washington has risen to 25-year highs. Meanwhile, our state has the fewest law-enforcement officers *per capita* in the country.
- **Rational Step Toward a Better Washington:** Senate Bill 5841 would, through a state-shared sales-tax credit, make a revenue stream of approximately \$250 million a year available to local governments to hire more law-enforcement officers, plus address a training backlog that delays officers from being on patrol.

### **Background**

In 2020, Washingtonians were the victims of more violent crimes than at any point since before the beginning of the 21st century.<sup>1</sup>

- Murder reached an all-time high in 2020, up 80% from 5 years ago.<sup>2</sup>
- Rape was up 40% from 5 years before, with 2019 reaching the highest level since 1995.<sup>3</sup>
- Aggravated assault was up 50% from 5 years earlier, also at the highest level since 1995.<sup>4</sup>

The issue is not just violent crime: the rate of property crime in Washington ranked fourth-worst in the country over the preceding 5 years.<sup>5</sup>

While 2021 statewide crime data is not yet available, preliminary data has Seattle reporting nearly 1,000 more violent crimes than in 2020, and in King County, the reported number of gunshot victims – including victims of shootings involving criminal gangs – had doubled from just 4 years earlier, hitting an all-time high.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Washington ranks dead last in the country in law-enforcement officers *per capita*.<sup>7</sup>

## **SB 5841: A Rational Step to Improve Public Safety**

[SB 5841](#), prime-sponsored by Sen. Jeff Holy, has two primary components:<sup>8</sup>

- **0.1% of State Sales Tax to Local Governments to Hire More Law Enforcement**

Local governments would have the authority to impose a 0.1% sales tax, which would be a credit against the state sales tax (hence, no increase to consumers – the state would get 6.4% and local governments 0.1% of the present 6.5% state tax).

Here's how the resulting revenues could be used:

- First, the local government must add law-enforcement officers until it reaches at least the national average per capita (2.4 per 1,000);<sup>9</sup>
- When the national per capita average is reached, a local government can use the funds in ways it deems best to reduce crime.

The 0.1% revenue source represents about \$250 million a year in revenue for this purpose.<sup>10</sup>

- **Increase Basic Law Enforcement Academy Classes to Minimum of 25 Per Year**

The Criminal Justice Training Commission says it has the capacity to train 25 classes of officers a year. SB 5841 would establish a 25-class minimum in statute.

Also, a backlog is causing hired officers to wait several months to receive the training they need to be on patrol. The bill would direct the CTJC to evaluate demand to ensure there are no waiting lists.

The 25-class minimum authorized in the bill represents an increase of roughly 50% over the historical class offerings during the past decade:<sup>11</sup>

Fiscal Year	Graduated
2021	17
2020	17
2019	17
2018	16
2017	18
2016	16
2015	15
2014	11
2013	7
2012	6

In addition, the bill would have the state pay the full cost of a cadet's training at the Basic Law Enforcement Academy. This was the policy until a few biennia ago, when local governments had to begin bearing 25% of that cost.

### **Conclusion**

- ***Law-enforcement officers are critical and vital to keeping the public safe, yet our state ranks dead last in the country in the officers per capita.***

***At a time when violent crime has risen to levels not seen in 25 years and property crime ranks among the worst in the country, SB 5841 is an important step to making Washington safer for all residents by increasing the number of law-enforcement officers patrolling our streets.***

### **Footnotes**

1. "Crime in Washington 2020 Annual Report", Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs <https://www.waspc.org/assets/CJIS/Crime%20in%20Washington%202020-small.pdf> There were 22,949 violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) in 2020. The last year with more incidents of violent crimes was in 1998.
2. *Id.* Murders (302) in 2020 were an all-time reported high. See prior year reports here: <https://www.waspc.org/cjis-statistics---reports>
3. *Id.* Rapes (2,879) in 2019 were the highest since 1995 (3,047).
4. *Id.* Aggravated assaults (15,010) in 2020 were the highest since 1995 (15,103).
5. "Washington State Economic Climate Study, Nov. 2021", Economic & Revenue Forecast Council (Washington ranked 47th worst for property crime per capita in CY 15-19) <https://erfc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/publications/Climate2021.pdf>

6. Seattle Police Department Crime Dashboard (4,483 violent crimes in 2020 vs. 5,355 preliminarily for 2021) <https://www.seattle.gov/police/information-and-data/crime-dashboard> King County Gun Violence Data (240 shooting victims in 2017 vs. 460 preliminarily for 2021).
7. <https://www.waspc.org/assets/docs/Crime%20In%20Washington%20Report%207-7-21%20FINAL.pdf> (citing <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-77>)
8. SB 5841: <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Bills/5841.pdf?q=20220202161622>
9. The national per capita average is based on the FBI report found here: <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/pages/le/pe> The national average is 2.4 per 1,000 and as a whole our state is at 1.4 per 1,000 (hence our dead last ranking). Any state or local jurisdiction's law enforcement per capita rate can be looked up at the link.
10. Revenues to locals (city & county) are based on the sales tax generated in their jurisdiction. On sales in their jurisdiction, in addition to the normal local sales tax they collect, they'd get 0.1% of the state sales tax that could only be used for the purposes in the bill.
11. Senate Ways & Means.