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Statements attributed to
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Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC)

WASPC STATEMENT ON HOUSE PASSAGE OF ESSB 5536 – “Blake”

The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) opposes ESSB 5536 as it passed the House. WASPC considers the version of the bill that passed the Senate to be a balanced approach bringing compassionate accountability to those who possess drugs. Unfortunately, the amendments adopted by the House undermine the Senate’s efforts.

WASPC believes compassion and treatment should be front and center in a legislative response to drug possession. Helping people who need help by making resources available, accessible, and affordable should be the standard to which the Legislature measures their success.

Strong bipartisan leadership from the Senate produced a bill focused on incentives for treatment by leveraging moderate and meaningful criminal justice response in instances where a person refuses or abandons treatment. We believe such a balance recognizes the need for a highly structured process to empower public safety professionals (including law enforcement, prosecutors, court personnel, and others) to intervene and guide persons suffering from substance use disorders through the treatment process and avoid criminal consequences. We maintain our position that helping people is the priority.

The House passed a bill that reduces incentives for treatment, reduces accountability for those who refuse treatment, and preempts local responses to paraphernalia and public use. We are concerned that people may opt for a few days in jail rather than complete the required treatment. We believe the House version will result in more people in jail, more criminal records, fewer people accessing and completing treatment, and a continuation of the chaos we are seeing in our public spaces. Most importantly, it will result in more of our neighbors, friends and family members remaining addicted and continue increases in overdoses..

Washington’s experiment with effective legalization of drugs has failed. The House amendments to ESSB 5536 allow for more of the same. WASPC would prefer the Legislature take no action rather than see the House amendments enacted. The House bill preempts local ordinances, which prevent local governments from providing leadership to address the crime happening in their communities. Adopting the misdemeanor consequence in the House bill, combined with pre-emption, means the Washington Legislature is choosing to do nothing and requires local governments do the same.

The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) continues to urge the Legislature to enact a bipartisan bill that provides for compassionate accountability to help those who need help.

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