



## 2024 Issue Paper: Criminal Justice

### Positions

The League of Women Voters of Washington recognizes the need for a “criminal justice system that is just, effective, equitable, transparent and that fosters public trust at all stages, including policing practices, pre-trial procedures, sentencing, incarceration and re-entry.”

This includes:

- Elimination of systemic bias, including the disproportionate policing and incarceration of marginalized communities;
- Policing practices that promote safety for both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve;
- Collaboration between government and community throughout every stage of the criminal justice system;
- A focus on humane treatment and rehabilitation with the goal of promoting the successful re-entry into communities of those who have been incarcerated; and
- Reliance on evidence-based research in decision-making about law-enforcement programs and policies (including scheduled, periodic audits of program and policy effectiveness).

### Summary of 2024 Legislative Session Issues

While important criminal justice legislation was passed during the 2023 session, there is still much work to be done in the areas of police reform and accountability, prison conditions and sentencing reform. Because 2024 is a short session during an election year, it will require especially hard work to ensure that the legislature continues to move forward on these issues.

Police reform and accountability (in partnership with the [Washington Coalition for Police Accountability](#))

- Traffic Safety for All. Traffic stops are by far the most common interaction between law enforcement and the public, with people of color being disproportionately stopped and searched. And the results can be fatal, as in the cases of Carolos Hunter I Vancouver and Giovonn Joseph McDade in Kent. By refocusing law enforcement efforts on safety-related violations, communities can be made safer for all. [HB 1513/SB 5572](#).
- Attorney General Investigations and Reform. Currently the state lacks a mechanism to investigate and remedy systemic misconduct by law enforcement agencies and must rely on the backlogged federal Department of Justice to take action. By empowering the state Attorney General’s office to act where there have been long-standing practices

that violate civil rights, public trust in law enforcement can be restored among all community members. [HB 1445](#).

- Independent Prosecutor. A task force set up by Governor Inslee in 2020 made two recommendations for improvement in the areas of use of deadly force and police accountability. The first – setting up an Office of Independent Investigations – has been implemented. The next step is to create an Office of Independent Prosecutor within the Attorney General’s office. This is necessary to address concerns about conflicts of interest that may arise when local prosecutors, who work closely with police officers in building cases, are faced with the decision as to whether to bring charges against those same officers resulting from the use of deadly force. [HB 1579](#).

#### Prison Conditions.

- Ending Long-Term Solitary Confinement. The United Nations has recognized that solitary confinement for a period of more than 15 days constitutes torture. And research establishes that solitary confinement inflicts severe, often irreversible psychological and physical damage. Legislation is needed to both reduce the length of time people can be held in solitary confinement and to improve conditions for those who are placed in solitary. [HB 1087/SB 5135](#)
- Voting in Prison. Widespread removal of the right to vote from people who have been convicted of a felony has its roots in the Jim Crow laws enacted following the end of the Civil War. Along with poll taxes and literacy tests, these laws were aimed at preventing Black men from voting. Reinstating the right to vote for all citizens in Washington state will begin to undo the harm caused by decades of racial discrimination and help people in prison become better integrated into our society. (Bill # TBD)

#### Sentencing Reform (in partnership with [Look2Justice](#))

- Juvenile Points Retroactivity. In 2023, the legislature eliminated the mandatory consideration of juvenile adjudications during sentencing, based on new information about developmental brain science. A bill will be introduced in 2024 to make this legislation retroactive, a necessary step to address the harms caused by harsh sentencing laws and racial disparities that have had such harmful effects. (Bill # TBD)
- Emerging Adults Resentencing. Currently people who were convicted before age 18 and sentenced to decades in prison can seek reconsideration of those sentences. It is now known that young people’s brains are rarely developed before age 25. Extending the age for reconsideration of long sentences from 18 to 25 accounts for developments in brain science, advances racial justice, and recognizes the capacity of people to change. [SB 5451/HB 1325](#)

**Issue Chair:** Heather Kelly, 415-516-1201; [hkelly@lwvwa.org](mailto:hkelly@lwvwa.org)