

# WASHINGTON COUNTIES IN CRISIS

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Counties and cities are responsible for law enforcement, criminal justice and public safety. But for the last decade, Washington counties have faced a 1% cap on the annual property tax increases they can receive. Costs have outpaced revenue, creating a budget gap that gets worse every year. Here are some first-hand accounts of the situation from across the State of Washington:

### Public Safety

**“Our county has lost 10 deputy positions. I’m a second-generation sheriff, and today I have the same number of deputies that my father did in 1976.”**

Sheriff Mark Nelson, Cowlitz County

**“Our county does not currently have 24-hour law enforcement coverage.”**

Dave Sauter, Klickitat County Commissioner

**“Our jail is often staffed with only one person, when there should be at least four people working. And at times, we have to measure response time in hours, not minutes.”**

Sheriff Scott Johnson, Pacific County

**“We have four deputies covering 2,400 square miles while simultaneously facing growing homeless and opioid addiction issues.”**

Sheriff Rob Snaza, Lewis County

**“Property crimes are up more than 40% in King County and we don’t have the resources to combat the issue.”**

Ken Thomas, City of Kent Police Chief

**“To fund police officer positions, our community ran a GoFundMe campaign.”**

Dan Yourkoski, Normandy Park Chief of Police

**“Delayed response times are the result of an ongoing shortage in deputy staffing levels, tracing back to budget cuts of 34 deputies nearly 10 years ago. Our limited resources mean we cannot investigate one third of all solvable felony property crimes.”**

Chris Wiese, Business Operations Director for Spokane County Sheriff’s Office

### Justice

**“We have lost more than 50 positions. We have a backlog of more than 400 felony cases in my office since this tax cap went into effect. It feels like the era of perpetual cuts.”**

Dan Satterberg, King County Prosecutor

### Fire Safety and Response

**“The 1% revenue cap doesn’t allow our department to update equipment. The average age of our essential equipment is 14 years.”**

Keith Wright, Central Pierce County Fire Chief

**“In Thurston County, fire service requests have increased up to 8% each year. But the cost to go out for a ballot measure to the voters can exceed the cost of adding a firefighter to the streets.”**

Steve Brooks, Lacey Fire District Chief

### Health

**“We are no longer able to track the estimated 100,000 cases of latent Tuberculosis in our county, so we can’t treat people before they become contagious. Also, we are stretched beyond capacity to investigate other infectious diseases so we’re not proactively able to prevent outbreaks.”**

Kathy Lambert, King County Councilmember

### Local Control for Local Budget Management

**“As a fiscally conservative republican, I originally voted in support of the 1% property revenue cap, but I was wrong. Currently, Kittitas County has two unfunded sheriff deputy positions and four unfunded correctional officer positions.”**

Paul Jewell, Kittitas County Commissioner

**“We are in budgeting crisis mode—having to choose among necessities, such as whether to fix the falling court house roof or invest in infrastructures and salaries. As a rural county, we can’t rely on increases to sales tax.”**

Tammie Ownbey, Pend Oreille County Clerk

**“Lincoln County has had to divert \$500,000 from the road fund to traffic policing.”**

Scott Hutsell, Lincoln County Commissioner