



**Robert R. Snaza**  
Sheriff

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**"Public Safety through Professional Service"**

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## SHERIFF PRESS RELEASE

**Date/Time:** July 9, 2021 @ 0800  
**Contact:** Sheriff Robert R. Snaza  
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### WASHINGTON POLICE REFORM LAWS MENTAL HEALTH CRISES & POLICE RESPONSE

Law enforcement is often called to mental health crises; in many instances, a crime is not involved. Therefore, deputies respond in a community caretaking function in hopes of assisting someone in crisis needing help. Concerns across the country have surfaced about police responses to those in mental health crisis, particularly when use of force is used. Recent legislation has passed to address these concerns by limiting how law enforcement responds and interacts with individuals facing a mental health crisis. The ultimate goal moving forward is to transfer those interactions to mental health professionals, which is a goal the Sheriff's Office wholeheartedly supports.

Currently, when a deputy encounters someone who appears to be a danger to him/herself or others, that deputy may take the person involuntarily to an appropriate mental health provider for treatment. At present, the bar for involuntary committal is very high, in that the individual is actively suicidal, unable to care for him/herself, or threatening someone with physical violence. Under the new legislation taking effect late this month, the bar is raised even higher. Moving forward, deputies will only be allowed to use force to detain an individual in mental health crisis if they pose an "imminent threat" to themselves or others. The new law/legislation defines "imminent threat" as "Based on the totality of the circumstances, it's objectively reasonable to believe that a person has the present and apparent ability, opportunity, and intent to immediately cause death or serious bodily injury..." (See House Bill 1310, sec. 3). Additionally, the new law recommends that law enforcement leave the area completely once it is determined that the individual in a mental health crisis does not meet the requirements for an involuntary committal, and is not committing a crime.

What will this look like for our deputies and community moving forward? The answer is difficult but a reality. Deputies will be detaining fewer individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Deputies may not respond at all unless there is an "imminent threat" or criminal activity has occurred. When deputies do respond, they will utilize all the tools available to deescalate the encounter by talking to those individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. However, with that being said, if the individual no longer wants to talk and interact with the deputy, and displays no imminent threat, the deputy will leave the area as directed by law.

At present, there are no additional resources identified for mental health crisis field response, beyond what is already allocated. Lewis County crisis responders will be exploring and looking into alternative field response resources to address this critical issue. As resources are identified and become available, the Lewis County Sheriff's Office will work with our mental health professionals to improve crisis services to the citizens of Lewis County and the community we serve.

**Lewis County Sheriff's Office Mission Statement:**

Being a committed community partner, providing professional service to enhance the safety, security, and quality of life in Lewis County.