

POLICY NOTE

Initiative 1474, to authorize police pursuits to prevent violent crime

by Paul Guppy, Vice President for Research

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Key Findings

1. Initiative 1474 is an initiative to the legislature that would allow the police to pursue criminals when they have a reasonable suspicion that a violent crime has taken place.
2. If the measure gains enough signatures lawmakers can adopt it next session, propose an alternative or take no action.
3. If lawmakers do not pass the initiative it will be placed on the November 2023 ballot, possibly with an alternative.
4. In 2021 the legislature passed a bill, HB 1054, that greatly restricts the ability of police to chase DUI drivers or those who may have broken the law.
5. Since passage law enforcement data and media reports indicate a widespread rise in crime and of people refusing to stop for the police.
6. Sponsors call their proposal the “Don’t let bad guys get away” initiative.
7. Initiative 1474 would partly amend the action taken by the legislature in 2021 and authorize the return of prior standards of police work.

Introduction

A group of concerned citizens called Let’s Go Washington is gathering signatures for a proposed people’s initiative to the legislature, Initiative 1474, to allow the police to pursue someone when there is a reasonable suspicion the person has committed a crime. The measure aims to enhance public safety and the quality of professional policing in communities across the state.¹

Initiative sponsors need to collect 324,516 valid signatures (8% of the votes cast in the last election for governor) to submit Initiative 1474 for consideration in the 2023 legislative session. The signatures must be received by the Secretary of State’s office by December 30, 2022.²

If the measure qualifies lawmakers have three choices:³

- They can enact the initiative into law as is (the governor’s signature is not required);
- They can take no action in which case the initiative is forwarded to voters on the November 2023 ballot. If voters approve the initiative it becomes law;
- They can pass their own alternative version, in which case both versions, the original and the legislature’s, will appear on the November 2023 ballot. Voters will first decide if either version should become law and, if so, indicate on the same ballot which one should pass.

Text of Initiative 1474

The text of Initiative 1474 provides that local police and the state patrol may chase a vehicle when law enforcement officials have made a reasonable determination that the vehicle is driven by or contains a

1 “I-1474, Restore Policy Pursuit,” The Initiatives, Let’s Go Washington, accessed November 2, 2022, at <https://letsgowashington.com/initiatives/>.

2 “Initiatives and Referenda Handbook – 2022,” Elections Division, Office of the Secretary of State, Washington State, accessed October 20, 2022, at https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/initiatives/initiative-and-referenda-handbook-2022.pdf.

3 Ibid.

person or persons who have committed a crime or who may have information about criminal activity.⁴

Here is the official ballot title for Initiative 1475:⁵

Ballot Title

“Initiative Measure No. 1474 concerns vehicular pursuits by peace officers. This measure would reduce certain restrictions on vehicular pursuits, allowing them upon certain conditions including reasonable suspicion of certain criminal offenses and necessity of identifying or apprehending people who pose public safety risks.

Should this measure be enacted into law?”

Ballot Measure Summary

“This measure would reduce certain restrictions on when peace officers may conduct vehicular pursuits. Such pursuits would be allowed when there is reasonable suspicion a person has violated certain laws, pursuit is necessary to identify or apprehend the person, the person poses a public safety risk, the safety risks of failing to apprehend or identify the person are greater than those of the pursuit, and pursuit is authorized by or reported to a supervisor.”

Policy analysis

In April 2021 the state legislature passed, on party-line votes, a series of bills to restrict the ability of police while protecting the community. One of those bills, HB 1054, prevents the police from pursuing suspects or detaining people who may have committed a crime or who may have information about a crime. Governor Inslee signed the bill in May 2021.

Since then, suspected criminals have learned they can simply run away from the police. The state patrol reports 934 incidents of drivers who simply ignored lights and sirens when police tried to make a traffic stop.⁶ One law-breaking driver called 911 and complained that the police were still following him. He said, “It’s a violation of 1054 – he’s not allowed to chase me.”⁷

4 “I-1474, Restore Police Pursuit,” Initiative Full Text, The Initiatives, Let’s Go Washington, accessed November 2, 2022, at <https://letsgowashington.com/i-1475/>, and “Initiative Measure No. 1474,” Office of the Secretary of State, Washington State, April 13, 2022, at <https://www2.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/initiatives.aspx?y=2022&t=l>.

5 “Initiative 1474, Ballot Title and Ballot Measure Summary,” Office of the Attorney General, Washington State, April 13, 2022, at https://www2.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/initiatives/ballottitleletter_2632.pdf.

6 “Fewer drivers stopping for police, Washington State Patrol Says,” King 5 News, May 31, 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wu6yeGovDjI>; and “WPC: Drivers refusing to stop for troopers,” KPTV Fox News 12, May 31, 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFtI05qnBkA>.

7 “Washington state drivers aren’t stopping for police anymore because cops can’t chase them,” by Sandy Malone, The Police Tribune, May 31, 2022, at <https://policetribune.com/washington-state-drivers-arent-stopping-for-police-anymore-because-cops-cant-chase-them/>.



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Law enforcement officials also report that since HB 1054 passed violent crime rates have increased and vehicle thefts are up by 93%.⁸

Initiative 1474 would allow police to gather information and conduct normal criminal investigations. It would also prevent crime by allowing police to pursue and arrest suspects based on reasonable conclusions about the available evidence. Effective pursuit and detention would prevent suspects from committing new crimes after they have escaped from the police.

Conclusion

Initiative 1474 would partially amend the actions taken by the legislature in the 2021 session that weakened the ability of police to protect law-abiding citizens from being harmed by violent criminals. The measure would allow police to make stops when they have a reasonable suspicion that a crime has taken place, and to pursue criminals when police determine that letting them go would endanger the public.

This would authorize the former standard for police work, allowing investigators to gather facts and hold criminals accountable. This policy change would promote the public interest and provide safer communities for everyone living in Washington state, especially in areas where repeated patterns of crime pose the greatest threat to human life, health and property.

⁸ "Police try to combat surging car thefts across Washington state," King 5 News, March 21, 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJMIQK6GzlQ>.