



National Sheriffs' Association



Western States Sheriffs' Association

The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the Western States Sheriffs' Association (WSSA) stand united in opposition to recent legislative efforts in Washington State and New York State to undermine the constitutional and statutory authority of the Office of Sheriff. Proposals, in part, to create unelected oversight boards or committees empowered to direct or remove elected sheriffs constitute a direct attack on a constitutionally established office. Simply put, this is an affront to the citizens who elect their sheriffs through the democratic process.

There is a fundamental distinction between appointed and elected officials. Chiefs of police serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority, such as a mayor or city council. By contrast, sheriffs derive their authority directly from the United States Constitution, their state constitutions, statutes, and the electorate. Legislative efforts to vest removal authority in unelected boards or committees threaten this foundational structure and set a dangerous precedent that erodes democratic accountability.

The Office of Sheriff is unique in American law enforcement because of its direct accountability to the people. It is not a subordinate department of county or state government but an independent constitutional office through which the sheriff exercises the public trust. No individual or small group has the authority to hire, fire, or dictate the operations of the sheriff. Instead, sheriffs are accountable to the United States Constitution, their respective state constitutions and statutes, and, most importantly, the voters they serve. In fulfilling their duties, sheriffs work cooperatively with local, state, tribal, and federal partners to uphold the rule of law and protect their communities.

The democratic election of sheriffs is deeply rooted in our nation's history. Beginning with Pennsylvania and New Jersey in 1776 and followed by Ohio in 1802, states across the country adopted the elected sheriff as a constitutional office. Today, approximately 98 percent of the nation's over 3,000 sheriffs are elected by the citizens of their counties or parishes, reflecting a longstanding, deliberate commitment to local accountability. This structure ensures that the chief law enforcement officer remains accountable to the people rather than to political bodies.

Preserving the Office of Sheriff is essential to the health of our republic. With limited exceptions, the sheriff remains the only chief law enforcement officer in the United States who is directly accountable to the people. The National Sheriffs' Association reaffirmed this principle in Resolution 2010-1, which underscores the importance of maintaining the office as an elected position, consistent with our nation's constitutional traditions.

The separation of powers is a cornerstone of both the United States Constitution and state constitutions. Legislative efforts to assert control over the executive branch and an independently elected executive officer clearly violate that principle and diminish the people's right to choose their local law enforcement leadership. The Office of Sheriff belongs to the citizens of each county—not to legislatures or appointed bodies.

The proposals in Washington State and New York State place legislative will above the will of the electorate, undermining the very essence of representative democracy. It is deeply concerning that legislative or executive actors would seek to override the voters' authority by dictating who may serve as sheriff or how an elected sheriff must lead their office. Like legislators and governors, sheriffs are accountable to the people and may be removed through elections by the same citizens who entrusted them with the Office of Sheriff.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris West', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Sheriff Chris West  
Canadian County, Oklahoma  
President, National Sheriffs' Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Mark J. Dannels' in a cursive script.

Sheriff Mark Dannels  
Cochise County, Arizona  
President, Western States Sheriffs' Association