

EDITION

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For Third Straight Year, Police Suicides Outnumber Line-Of-Duty Deaths

Law enforcement agencies across the country lost at least 159 officers to suicide in 2018.



By **David Lohr**



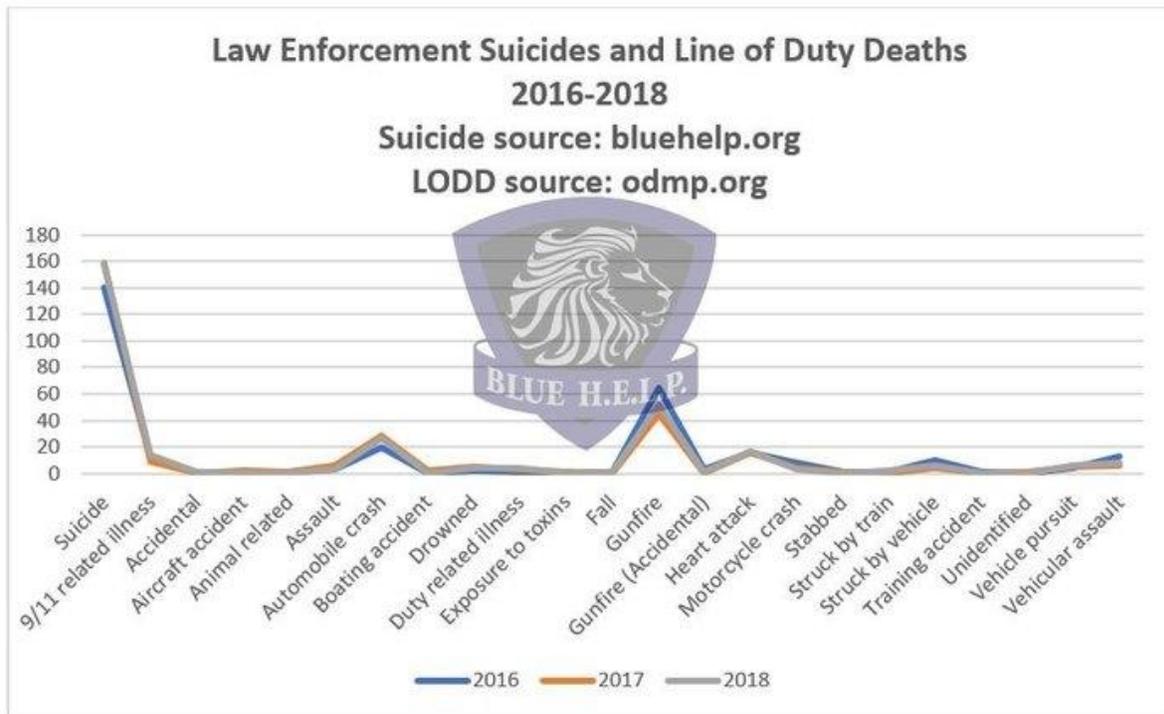
AVID_CREATIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES

The estimated number of law enforcement officers who died by suicide outnumbered those who died in the line of duty for the third straight year in 2018, a newly released study shows.

[Blue H.E.L.P.](#), a Massachusetts-based nonprofit run by active and retired police officers, medical professionals and victims' families, [compiled and released the grim data](#) this week.

According to the organization, at least 159 officers took their own lives in 2018 — the same number of suicide fatalities it tracked in 2017 and 19 more than in 2016.

By contrast, the estimated number of law enforcement officers who died in the line of duty last year was 145, according to an annual report [released by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund](#).



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In December alone, 20 officers died by suicide, whereas only 10 line-of-duty deaths were reported.

“The single greatest cause of death for law enforcement officers each year is suicide,” said Jeff McGill, vice president of Blue H.E.L.P.

The suicide fatalities include 151 men and eight women. The average age was 41, with an average length of service of 15 years.

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Four states – California, Florida, New York, and Texas – had the highest number of officer suicides, with each state reporting at least 10 fatalities in 2018.

2018 Law Enforcement Suicide by State

as of January 1, 2019

Prepared by Blue H.E.L.P.

Arkansas	1	Louisiana	5	Ohio	5
Arizona	1	Massachusetts	7	Oklahoma	2
California	12	Maryland	9	Oregon	1
Colorado	5	Maine	1	Pennsylvania	8
Connecticut	3	Minnesota	3	South Dakota	1
Delaware	1	Missouri	4	Tennessee	3
Florida	10	North Carolina	5	Texas	12
Georgia	2	North Dakota	2	Utah	1
Hawaii	2	Nebraska	1	Virginia	2
Iowa	1	New Hampshire	1	Vermont	1
Idaho	3	New Jersey	8	Wisconsin	4
Illinois	9	New Mexico	1	West Virginia	2
Indiana	1	Nevada	2	Wyoming	4
Kansas	3	New York	10		

www.bluehelp.org

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Because the federal government does not mandate the reporting of officer suicides, Blue H.E.L.P. must obtain and verify raw data from a number of sources, including individual law enforcement agencies and surviving family members.

“We know there are other tragic deaths by suicide that we don’t know about,” said Steven Hough, co-founder of Blue H.E.L.P. “So as bad a number as we have this year, we’re saddened by the fact that we know in reality the number is higher.”

According to experts, law enforcement officers die by suicide at a higher rate than those in other occupations, aside from the military. Common threads between suicides have been cited, including pressures of the job.

The Ruderman Family Foundation, a philanthropic institution, also found that first responders die by suicide at a higher rate than people in the general population, according to [an April 2018 report](#).

Law Enforcement Suicides and Line of Duty Deaths 2016-2018

Suicide source: bluehelp.org

LODD source: odmp.org

	2016	2017	2018
Suicide	140	159	159
9/11 related illness	12	9	14
Accidental	0	0	1
Aircraft accident	1	2	0
Animal related	1	1	0
Assault	3	6	3
Automobile crash	20	28	26
Boating accident	0	2	0
Drowned	2	5	4
Duty related illness	1	3	4
Exposure to toxins	0	1	0
Fall	1	0	1
Gunfire	64	45	52
Gunfire (Accidental)	3	0	1
Heart attack	16	16	17
Motorcycle crash	8	4	3
Stabbed	1	1	0
Struck by train	1	0	2
Struck by vehicle	10	4	6
Training accident	1	0	0
Unidentified	0	1	0
Vehicle pursuit	4	5	6
Vehicular assault	13	6	8

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Blue H.E.L.P. advocates for increased availability of mental health resources for law enforcement. The organization also seeks to normalize the treatment of post-traumatic stress symptoms.

“There is very little money being spent to reduce the numbers of officer suicides,” said Karen Solomon, president and co-founder of Blue H.E.L.P. “We hope that by raising awareness about the scope of this problem — and shining a light on the need for increased mental health resources directed to officers approaching crisis — we can ultimately reduce the number of officers who die by suicide.”

The organization said the number of deaths could change as it tabulates incidents from the end of the year.

As for 2019, on New Year’s Day at least one officer has already [reportedly died by suicide](#).

“Taking a real stance on officer safety will require us to address the elephant in the room,” Solomon said. “Addressing officer wellness which includes spiritual, mental, social, and physical health should be the number one priority for each agency head in 2019.”

If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#). You can also text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hour support from the [Crisis Text Line](#). Outside of the U.S., please visit the [International Association for Suicide Prevention](#) for a database of resources.

Send David Lohr an [email](#) or follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).