

## Police Suicide: A Devastating and Pervasive Issue

Law enforcement officers experience excessive stress as part of the job. From police bureaucracy, to physical and psychological trauma, officers experience a wide range of stressors negatively impacting their mental and physical health. This added stress results in increased use of sick leave, alcoholism, drug use, or even suicide; all of which are on the rise.

This week, a Montgomery County, MD Police Officer committed suicide while on duty and the 10th NYPD officer died by suicide in 2019. Their deaths represent a growing and disturbing trend among law enforcement officers that spans all ranks and years in service. “In 2018, at least 159 officers died by suicide, nine percent more than the total number of line-of-duty deaths resulting from 15 other causes such as felonious assault, patrol vehicle accident, heart attack, duty-related illness” (Blue H.E.L.P., 2019).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) lists following suicide warning signs:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings (2019).

Suicide is preventable. Regrettably, seeking help has long been seen as weakness in policing; on the contrary, it should be considered a personal strength when someone has the fortitude to seek help or encourage others to obtain professional assistance.

The USDHHS recommends calling the Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), if assistance is required. Pay attention to the warning signs of fellow officers and be strong---ask for help if needed. Additionally, law enforcement agencies must create organizational conditions that welcome officers in need of assistance. Last year, Men's Health magazine published this article detailing issues associated with police suicide: ["Cops Are Dying By Suicide – and No One Is Talking About It."](#) Creating a police culture that does not stigmatize mental health issues is the responsibility of officers and their agencies, and can help save officer lives.