

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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BILL: CS/SB 1586

INTRODUCER: Children, Families, and Elder Affairs and Senators Hooper and Perry

SUBJECT: First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force

DATE: January 29, 2020

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Hendon	Hendon	CF	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.			MS	
3.			RC	

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 1586 creates the First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force within the Department of Children and Families' Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention. The task force is made up of representatives of the Florida Professional Firefighters, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, the Florida Fraternal Order of Police, the Florida Sheriffs Association, the Florida Police Chiefs Association, and the Florida Fire Chiefs Association. The task force is to identify or develop training programs and materials to better enable first responders to cope with life and work stress and foster an organizational culture that supports first responders. The task force is to report its findings and recommendations on preventing suicide to the Governor and Legislature each July 1. The task force expires after 3 years.

The bill is not expected to have a significant fiscal impact and has an effective date of July 1, 2020.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Suicide**

Suicide is a major public health issue and a leading cause of death nationally, with complex causes such as mental health and substance use disorders, painful losses, exposure to violence, and social isolation. Suicide rates increased in nearly every state from 1999 through 2016. In 2017, suicide was the second leading cause of death nationwide for persons aged 10–14, 15–19,

and 20–24. After stable trends from 2000 to 2007, suicide rates for persons aged 10–24 increased 56% from 2007 (6.8 per 100,000 persons) to 2017 (10.6).

While suicide is often characterized as a response to a single event or set of circumstances, suicide is, in fact, the result of complex interactions among neurobiological, genetic, psychological, social, cultural, and environmental risk and protective factors. The factors that contribute to any particular suicide are diverse; therefore, it is generally believed that efforts related to prevention must incorporate multiple approaches.

In Florida, the rate of suicides increased by 10.6% from 1996 to 2016. According to the 2017 Florida Morbidity Statistics Report, the total number of deaths due to suicide in Florida was 3,187 in 2017, a slight increase from 3,122 in 2016. Suicide was the eighth leading cause of death in Florida, and the suicide rate per 100,000 population was 15.5. This is a slight increase from 2016 (15.4). Suicide was the second leading cause of death for individuals within the 25-34 age group in 2017, and the third leading cause of death for individuals within the 15-24 age group; suicide was the fourth leading cause of death for individuals within the 5-14, 35-44, and 45-54 age groups.

### **Suicide Among First Responders**

The federal Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 was signed into law in January 2018, to recognize that law enforcement agencies need support in their ongoing efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees.<sup>1</sup> Officers anticipate and accept the unique dangers and pressures of their chosen profession. However, first responders under stress find it harder than people not experiencing stress to connect with others and regulate their own emotions. They may experience narrowed physical perception, increased anxiety and fearfulness, and degraded cognitive abilities. This can be part of a fight-or-flight response, but it can also lead to significantly greater probabilities of errors in judgment, compromised performance, and injuries. Failing to address the mental health and wellness of officers can ultimately undermine community support for law enforcement and result in officers being less safe on the job.

Psychological stress may also have serious consequences for the individual first responder's health. In particular, traumatic law enforcement work has been shown to increase officers' risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. PTSD is associated with major depression, panic attacks, phobias, mania, substance abuse, and increased risk of suicide. PTSD can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, heart disease, and stroke.

For law enforcement officers, the suicide rate per 100,000 population is estimated to be 28.2 for men and 12.2 for women.<sup>2</sup> For firefighters, the suicide rate per 100,000 population is estimated to be 18.<sup>3</sup> Under reporting of suicides among first responders is common. The Firefighter

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice website. See <https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwaresources> last visited Jan. 22, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Spence, Deborah L., Melissa Fox, Gilbert C. Moore, Sarah Estill, and Nazmia E.A. Comrie. 2019. Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act: Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. See <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p370-pub.pdf> last visited Jan. 22, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ruderman Foundation white paper. See [https://issuu.com/rudermanfoundation/docs/first\\_responder\\_white\\_paper\\_final\\_ac270d530f8bfb](https://issuu.com/rudermanfoundation/docs/first_responder_white_paper_final_ac270d530f8bfb) last visited Jan. 22, 2020

Behavioral Health Alliance estimates that approximately 40% of firefighter suicides are reported.<sup>4</sup>

### **Statewide Office and Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council**

The Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention (Statewide Office) is housed within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Among other things, the Statewide Office must coordinate education and training curricula in suicide prevention efforts for law enforcement personnel, first responders to emergency calls, health care providers, school employees, and other persons who may have contact with persons at risk of suicide.

The Statewide Office is required to operate within available resources but is allowed to seek and accept grants or funds from federal, state, or local sources to support the operation and defray the authorized expenses of the Statewide Office and the Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council.

The Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council (Council) is located within DCF and develops strategies for preventing suicide and advises the Statewide Office regarding the development of a statewide plan for suicide prevention. A report on the plan is prepared and presented annually to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Council is comprised of 27 voting members and 1 nonvoting member. The director of the Statewide Office appoints 13 members, while the Governor appoints 4 members, and 10 are state agency directors or their designees.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

**Section 1** amends s. 14.2019, F.S., that establishes the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention to create the First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force. The task force is located within and supported by the statewide office. The purpose of the task force is to make recommendations on how to reduce the incidence of suicide among current and retired first responders. The task force is made up of representatives of the Florida Professional Firefighters, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, the Florida Fraternal Order of Police, the Florida Sheriffs Association, the Florida Police Chiefs Association, and the Florida Fire Chiefs' Association.

In addition to making recommendations to reduce suicide, the task force is to identify or develop training programs and materials for first responders. The programs and materials are to better enable first responders to cope with life and work stress and foster an organizational culture that supports first responders. The bill identifies a supportive organizational culture as one that:

- Promotes mutual support and solidarity among first responders,
- Trains supervisors to identify suicidal risk among first responders,
- Improves the use of existing resources by first responders, and
- Educates first responders on suicide awareness and help-seeking.

The task force is to identify public and private resources to implement identified training programs and materials. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

Governor and Legislature each July 1, beginning in 2021. Consistent with s. 20.03, F.S., the task force expires after 3 years.

**Section 2** provides an effective date of July 1, 2020.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The task force is not expected to have a significant fiscal impact on the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention housed within the Department of Children and Families.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 14.2019 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs on January 28, 2020:**

The CS adds the Florida Police Benevolent Association, the Florida Fraternal Order of Police, and the Florida Fire Chiefs' Association to the First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.