

**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 Military and Veterans Affairs and Space

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BILL: CS/SB 1586

INTRODUCER: Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee and Senator Hooper and others

SUBJECT: First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force

DATE: February 11, 2020

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Hendon</u>	<u>Hendon</u>	<u>CF</u>	<u>Fav/CS</u>
2.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Caldwell</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>Favorable</u>
3.	_____	_____	<u>RC</u>	_____

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

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

**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 will provide recommendations on reducing suicide rates amongst active and retired first responders. In so doing, the bill requires the task force to identify or develop training programs, materials, and resources to better enable first responders to cope with life and work stress and foster a supportive organizational culture.

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 must report findings and recommendations on preventing suicide to the Governor and Legislature each July 1 from 2021 through 2023, at which time the task force will expire.

**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.<sup>1</sup> In that timeframe, on average, suicide rates increased more than 30 percent in 25 states.<sup>2</sup>

While suicide is often characterized as a response to a single event or set of circumstances, suicide is, in fact, the result of multiple factors, spanning individual, family and other relationships, community, and societal causes. As the factors that contribute to any particular suicide are considered diverse, efforts related to prevention must incorporate multiple approaches.

In Florida, at 3,187 deaths in 2017, suicide was the 8th leading cause of death.<sup>3</sup> The number of suicides in the state increased to 3,552 in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

### **Suicide Among First Responders**

First responders include law enforcement personnel, firefighters, and emergency medical services workers. In comparison to the general population, first responders are at heightened risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide. Further, police and firefighters are more likely to commit suicide than die in the line of duty.<sup>5</sup> Many first responders previously served in the military, which likely exposed them to trauma prior to becoming a first responder.<sup>6</sup> Suicide amongst first responders is considered to be grossly underreported. For example, in a study conducted by the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance (FBHA), researchers estimate that only about 40 percent of firefighter suicides are reported.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017**

Signed into law January 2018, the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 calls for the U.S. Department of Justice to review and report to Congress on mental health practices and services in the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that could be adopted by law enforcement agencies to support first responders.<sup>8</sup> The law additionally directs the Department of Justice to make recommendations on:

- Effectiveness of crisis lines for law enforcement officers;

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Vital Signs, Suicide rising across the US*; available at <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/infographic.html#graphic1> (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (June 8, 2018)*; available at [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6722a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6722a1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6722a1.htm?s_cid=mm6722a1_w) (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Vital Statistics, Florida Department of Health, *FLHealthCHARTS Quick Facts (Sept. 2018)*; available at <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/QuickFacts.aspx> (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Vital Statistics, Florida Department of Health, *FLHealthCHARTS, Suicide crude death rate*; available at [http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/DataViewer/DeathViewer/ten\\_year\\_report\\_OLAP.aspx?indnumber=0116&year=2018&ageFrom=0&ageTo=999](http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/DataViewer/DeathViewer/ten_year_report_OLAP.aspx?indnumber=0116&year=2018&ageFrom=0&ageTo=999) (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Miriam Heyman, Jeff Dill, and Robert Douglas, *The Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders* (April 2018), pg. 7-12; available at [https://issuu.com/rudermanfoundation/docs/first\\_responder\\_white\\_paper\\_final\\_ac270d530f8bfb](https://issuu.com/rudermanfoundation/docs/first_responder_white_paper_final_ac270d530f8bfb). PTSD rates amongst first responders, in contrast to the 6.8 percent reported for the general population, significantly increase to 14.6 percent to 22 percent for firefighters, and 35 percent for police officers.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Services (LEMHWA) Program Resources*; available at <https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwareources> (last visited Feb. 5, 2020).

- Efficacy of yearly mental health checks for law enforcement officers;
- Expanded peer mentoring programs; and
- Ensuring privacy for participants of these programs.<sup>9</sup>

The report, provided to Congress on March 2019, includes the following recommendations to enhance mental health and reduce suicide rates:

- Support the development of resources for community-based clinicians who interact with law enforcement and their families;
- Support placement of mental health professionals in law enforcement agencies;
- Encourage programs that permit retired law enforcement officers to access departmental peer support programs after separating employment;
- Support the development of model policies and implementation guidelines for agencies to make substantial efforts to reduce suicide;
- Support the creation of a Law Enforcement Suicide Event report surveillance system;
- Evaluate the efficacy of crisis lines;
- Support the expansion of peer support programs; and
- Bolster privacy protections for officers seeking support from peer crisis lines and other support programs.<sup>10</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). As part of its duties, 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.<sup>11</sup>

The Statewide Office is required to operate within available resources but is authorized to seek and accept grants or funds from federal, state, or local sources to support the operation and defray its and that of the Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council.<sup>12</sup>

The Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council (Council), located within the Statewide Office, develops strategies for preventing suicide and advises the Statewide Office regarding the development of a statewide plan for suicide prevention.<sup>13</sup> The Council must annually by January 1 of each year submit a report on suicide prevention programs and activities to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Public Law 115-113.

<sup>10</sup> Spence, Deborah L., Melissa Fox, Gilbert C. Moore, Sarah Estill, and Nazmia E.A. Comrie, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act, Report to Congress* (March 2019); available at <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p370-pub.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Section 14.2019(1) and (2), F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 14.2019(3), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Section 14.20195(1), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 14.20195(1)(c), F.S.

## **Task Force**

A task force is an advisory body appointed as a temporary body to study a specific problem and recommend a solution or policy alternative to address that problem. The task force expires after completing its assignment. However, time limits apply. If created without specific statutory enactment, the term of the task force is limited to 1 year. If created in statute, the existence of the task force is capped at 3 years. Otherwise, its existence terminates upon completing its assignment.<sup>15</sup>

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

This bill establishes the First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force. The task force is located within and supported by the Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention. 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 bill requires the task force 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 bill identifies as a supportive organizational culture one that:

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

The bill requires the task force to identify public and private resources to implement the training programs and materials. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature each July 1, beginning in 2021. Consistent with s. 20.03, F.S., the task force expires after 3 years.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2020.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

The bill does not appear to require cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Article VII, Section 18, of the State Constitution.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

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<sup>15</sup> Section 20.03(8), F.S.

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 of 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 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.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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