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## Police and Detectives

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### Significant Points

- Police work can be dangerous and stressful.
- Education requirements range from a high school diploma to a college degree or higher.
- Job opportunities in most local police departments will be excellent for qualified individuals, while competition is expected for jobs in State and Federal agencies.
- Applicants with college training in police science or military police experience will have the best opportunities.

### Nature of the Work

People depend on police officers and detectives to protect their lives and property. Law enforcement officers, some of whom are State or Federal special agents or inspectors, perform these duties in a variety of ways depending on the size and type of their organization. In most jurisdictions, they are expected to exercise authority when necessary, whether on or off duty.

Police and detectives pursue and apprehend individuals who break the law and then issue citations or give warnings. A large proportion of their time is spent writing reports and maintaining records of incidents they encounter. Most police officers patrol their jurisdictions and investigate any suspicious activity they notice. Detectives, who are often called agents or special agents, perform investigative duties such as gathering facts and collecting evidence.

The daily activities of police and detectives differ depending on their occupational specialty—such as police officer, game warden, or detective—and whether they are working for a local, State, or Federal agency. Duties also differ substantially among various Federal agencies, which enforce different aspects of the law. Regardless of job duties or location, police officers and detectives at all levels must write reports and maintain meticulous records that will be needed if they testify in court.

Uniformed police officers have general law enforcement duties, including maintaining regular patrols and responding to calls for service. Much of their time is spent responding to calls and doing paperwork. They may direct traffic at the scene of an accident, investigate a burglary, or give first aid to an accident victim. In large police departments, officers usually are assigned to a specific type of duty. Many urban police agencies are involved in community policing—a practice in which an officer builds relationships with the citizens of local neighborhoods and mobilizes the public to help fight crime.

Police agencies are usually organized into geographic districts, with uniformed officers assigned to patrol a specific area such as part of the business district or outlying residential neighborhoods. Officers may work alone, but in large agencies, they often patrol with a partner. While on patrol, officers attempt to become thoroughly familiar with their patrol area and

remain alert for anything unusual. Suspicious circumstances and hazards to public safety are investigated or noted, and officers are dispatched to individual calls for assistance within their district. During their shift, they may identify, pursue, and arrest suspected criminals; resolve problems within the community; and enforce traffic laws.

Some agencies have special geographic jurisdictions and enforcement responsibilities. Public college and university police forces, public school district police, and agencies serving transportation systems and facilities are examples. Most law enforcement workers in special agencies are uniformed officers; a smaller number are investigators.

Some police officers specialize in a particular field, such as chemical and microscopic analysis, training and firearms instruction, or handwriting and fingerprint identification. Others work with special units, such as horseback, bicycle, motorcycle, or harbor patrol; canine corps; special weapons and tactics (SWAT); or emergency response teams. A few local and special law enforcement officers primarily perform jail-related duties or work in courts. (For information on other officers who work in jails and prisons, see correctional officers elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

*Sheriffs* and *deputy sheriffs* enforce the law on the county level. Sheriffs are usually elected to their posts and perform duties similar to those of a local or county police chief. Sheriffs' departments tend to be relatively small, most having fewer than 50 sworn officers. Deputy sheriffs have law enforcement duties similar to those of officers in urban police departments. Police and sheriffs' deputies who provide security in city and county courts are sometimes called bailiffs.

*State police officers*, sometimes called *State troopers* or *highway patrol officers*, arrest criminals Statewide and patrol highways to enforce motor vehicle laws and regulations. State police officers often issue traffic citations to motorists. At the scene of accidents, they may direct traffic, give first aid, and call for emergency equipment. They also write reports used to determine the cause of the accident. State police officers are frequently called upon to render assistance to other law enforcement agencies, especially those in rural areas or small towns.

State law enforcement agencies operate in every State except Hawaii. Most full-time sworn personnel are uniformed officers who regularly patrol and respond to calls for service. Others work as investigators, perform court-related duties, or carry out administrative or other assignments.

Detectives are plainclothes investigators who gather facts and collect evidence for criminal cases. Some are assigned to interagency task forces to combat specific types of crime. They conduct interviews, examine records, observe the activities of suspects, and participate in raids or arrests. Detectives and State and Federal agents and inspectors usually specialize in investigating one type of violation, such as homicide or fraud. They are assigned cases on a rotating basis and work on them until an arrest and conviction is made or until the case is dropped.

*Fish and game wardens* enforce fishing, hunting, and boating laws. They patrol hunting and fishing areas, conduct search and rescue operations, investigate complaints and accidents, and aid in prosecuting court cases.

The Federal Government works in many areas of law enforcement. *Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents* are the Government's principal investigators, responsible for investigating violations of more than 200 categories of Federal law and

conducting sensitive national security investigations. Agents may conduct surveillance, monitor court-authorized wiretaps, examine business records, investigate white-collar crime, or participate in sensitive undercover assignments. The FBI investigates a wide range of criminal activity, including organized crime, public corruption, financial crime, bank robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, espionage, drug trafficking, and cyber crime.

There are many other Federal agencies that enforce particular types of laws. *U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents* enforce laws and regulations relating to illegal drugs. *U.S. marshals and deputy marshals* protect the Federal courts and ensure the effective operation of the judicial system. *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives agents* enforce and investigate violations of Federal firearms and explosives laws, as well as Federal alcohol and tobacco tax regulations. The *U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security special agents* are engaged in the battle against terrorism.

The Department of Homeland Security also employs numerous law enforcement officers within several different agencies, including Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Secret Service. *U.S. Border Patrol agents* protect more than 8,000 miles of international land and water boundaries. *Immigration inspectors* interview and examine people seeking entrance to the United States and its territories. *Customs inspectors* enforce laws governing imports and exports by inspecting cargo, baggage, and articles worn or carried by people, vessels, vehicles, trains, and aircraft entering or leaving the United States. *Federal Air Marshals* provide air security by guarding against attacks targeting U.S. aircraft, passengers, and crews. *U.S. Secret Service special agents* and *U.S. Secret Service uniformed officers* protect the President, Vice President, their immediate families, and other public officials. Secret Service special agents also investigate counterfeiting,



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forgery of Government checks or bonds, and fraudulent use of credit cards.

Other Federal agencies employ police and special agents with sworn arrest powers and the authority to carry firearms. These agencies include the Postal Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Law Enforcement, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service.

**Work environment.** Police and detective work can be very dangerous and stressful. In addition to the obvious dangers of confrontations with criminals, police officers and detectives need to be constantly alert and ready to deal appropriately with a number of other threatening situations. Many law enforcement officers witness death and suffering resulting from accidents and criminal behavior. A career in law enforcement may take a toll on their private lives.

The jobs of some Federal agents such as U.S. Secret Service and DEA special agents require extensive travel, often on very short notice. They may relocate a number of times over the course of their careers. Some special agents in agencies such as the U.S. Border Patrol work outdoors in rugged terrain for long periods and in all kinds of weather.

Uniformed officers, detectives, agents, and inspectors are usually scheduled to work 40-hour weeks, but paid overtime is common. Shift work is necessary because protection must be provided around the clock. Junior officers frequently work weekends, holidays, and nights. Police officers and detectives are required to work whenever they are needed and may work long hours during investigations. Officers in most jurisdictions, whether on or off duty, are expected to be armed and to exercise their authority when necessary.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Most police and detectives learn much of what they need to know on the job, often in their agency's police academy. Civil service regulations govern the appointment of police and detectives in most States, large municipalities, and special police agencies, as well as in many smaller jurisdictions. Candidates must be U.S. citizens, usually at least 20 years old, and must meet rigorous physical and personal qualifications.

**Education and training.** Applicants usually must have at least a high school education, and some departments require 1 or 2 years of college coursework or, in some cases, a college degree.

Law enforcement agencies encourage applicants to take courses or training related to law enforcement subjects after high school. Many entry-level applicants for police jobs have completed some formal postsecondary education, and a significant number are college graduates. Many junior colleges, colleges, and universities offer programs in law enforcement or administration of justice.

Physical education classes and participating in sports are also helpful in developing the competitiveness, stamina, and agility needed for many law enforcement positions. Knowledge of a foreign language is an asset in many Federal agencies and urban departments.

Many agencies pay all or part of the tuition for officers to work toward degrees in criminal justice, police science, administration of justice, or public administration and pay higher salaries to those who earn such a degree.

Before their first assignments, officers usually go through a period of training. In State and large local police departments, recruits get training in their agency's police academy, often for 12 to 14 weeks. In small agencies, recruits often attend a regional or State academy. Training includes classroom instruction in constitutional law and civil rights, State laws and local ordinances, and accident investigation. Recruits also receive training and supervised experience in patrol, traffic control, the use of firearms, self-defense, first aid, and emergency response. Police departments in some large cities hire high school graduates who are still in their teens as police cadets or trainees. They do clerical work and attend classes, usually for 1 to 2 years, until they reach the minimum age requirement and can be appointed to the regular force.

To be considered for appointment as an FBI agent, an applicant must be a college graduate and have at least 3 years of professional work experience, or have an advanced degree plus 2 years of professional work experience. An applicant who meets these criteria must also have one of the following: a college major in accounting, electrical engineering, information technology, or computer science; fluency in a foreign language; a degree from an accredited law school; or 3 years of related full-time work experience. All new FBI agents undergo 18 weeks of training at the FBI Academy on the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia.

Most other Federal law enforcement agencies require either a bachelor's degree or related work experience or a combination of the two. Federal law enforcement agents undergo extensive training, usually at the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia, or the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia. The educational requirements, qualifications, and training information for a particular Federal agency can be found on the agency's Web site, most of which are listed in the last section of this statement.

Fish and game wardens also must meet specific requirements. Most States require at least 2 years of college study. Once hired, fish and game wardens attend a training academy lasting from 3 to 12 months, sometimes followed by further training in the field.

**Other qualifications.** Civil service regulations govern the appointment of police and detectives in most States, large municipalities, and special police agencies, as well as in many smaller jurisdictions. Candidates must be U.S. citizens, usually at least 20 years old, and must meet rigorous physical and personal qualifications. Physical examinations for entrance into law enforcement often include tests of vision, hearing, strength, and agility. Eligibility for appointment usually depends on performance in competitive written examinations and previous education and experience.

Candidates should enjoy working with people and meeting the public. Because personal characteristics such as honesty, sound judgment, integrity, and a sense of responsibility are especially important in law enforcement, candidates are interviewed by senior officers, and their character traits and backgrounds are investigated. In some agencies, candidates are interviewed by a psychiatrist or a psychologist or given a personality test. Most applicants are subjected to lie detector examinations or drug

testing. Some agencies subject sworn personnel to random drug testing as a condition of continuing employment.

**Advancement.** Police officers usually become eligible for promotion after a probationary period ranging from 6 months to 3 years. In large departments, promotion may enable an officer to become a detective or to specialize in one type of police work, such as working with juveniles. Promotions to corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, and captain usually are made according to a candidate's position on a promotion list, as determined by scores on a written examination and on-the-job performance.

Continuing training helps police officers, detectives, and special agents improve their job performance. Through police department academies, regional centers for public safety employees established by the States, and Federal agency training centers, instructors provide annual training in self-defense tactics, firearms, use-of-force policies, sensitivity and communications skills, crowd-control techniques, relevant legal developments, and advances in law enforcement equipment.

## Employment

Police and detectives held about 861,000 jobs in 2006. Seventy-nine percent were employed by local governments. State police agencies employed about 11 percent, and various Federal agencies employed about 7 percent. A small proportion worked for educational services, rail transportation, and contract investigation and security services.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, police and detectives employed by local governments primarily worked in cities with more than 25,000 inhabitants. Some cities have very large police forces, while thousands of small communities employ fewer than 25 officers each.

## Job Outlook

Job opportunities in most local police departments will be excellent for qualified individuals, while competition is expected for jobs in State and Federal agencies. Average employment growth is expected.

**Employment change.** Employment of police and detectives is expected to grow 11 percent over the 2006-16 decade, about as fast as the average for all occupations. A more security-conscious society and population growth will contribute to the increasing demand for police services.

**Job prospects.** Overall opportunities in local police departments will be excellent for individuals who meet the psychological, personal, and physical qualifications. In addition to openings from employment growth, many openings will be created by the need to replace workers who retire and those who leave local agencies for Federal jobs and private sector security jobs. There will be more competition for jobs in Federal and State law enforcement agencies than for jobs in local agencies. Less competition for jobs will occur in departments that offer relatively low salaries or those in urban communities where the crime rate is relatively high. Applicants with military experience or college training in police science will have the best opportunities in local and State departments. Applicants with a bachelor's degree and several years of law enforcement or military experience, especially investigative experience, will have the best opportunities in Federal agencies.

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Police and detectives .....	—	861,000	959,000	97,000	11
First-line supervisors/managers of police and detectives .....	33-1012	93,000	102,000	8,500	9
Detectives and criminal investigators.....	33-3021	106,000	125,000	18,000	17
Fish and game wardens .....	33-3031	8,000	8,000	0	0
Police officers.....	33-3050	654,000	724,000	70,000	11
Police and sheriff's patrol officers .....	33-3051	648,000	719,000	70,000	11
Transit and railroad police .....	33-3052	5,600	5,900	400	6

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

The level of government spending determines the level of employment for police and detectives. The number of job opportunities, therefore, can vary from year to year and from place to place. Layoffs, on the other hand, are rare because retirements enable most staffing cuts to be handled through attrition. Trained law enforcement officers who lose their jobs because of budget cuts usually have little difficulty finding jobs with other agencies.

### Earnings

Police and sheriff's patrol officers had median annual earnings of \$47,460 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$35,600 and \$59,880. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$27,310, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$72,450. Median annual earnings were \$43,510 in Federal Government, \$52,540 in State government, and \$47,190 in local government.

In May 2006, median annual earnings of police and detective supervisors were \$69,310. The middle 50 percent earned between \$53,900 and \$83,940. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$41,260, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$104,410. Median annual earnings were \$85,170 in Federal Government, \$68,990 in State government, and \$68,670 in local government.

In May 2006, median annual earnings of detectives and criminal investigators were \$58,260. The middle 50 percent earned between \$43,920 and \$76,350. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$34,480, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$92,590. Median annual earnings were \$69,510 in Federal Government, \$49,370 in State government, and \$52,520 in local government.

Federal law provides special salary rates to Federal employees who serve in law enforcement. Additionally, Federal special agents and inspectors receive law enforcement availability pay (LEAP)—equal to 25 percent of the agent's grade and step—awarded because of the large amount of overtime that these agents are expected to work. For example, in 2007, FBI agents entered Federal service as GS-10 employees on the pay scale at a base salary of \$48,159, yet they earned about \$60,199 a year with availability pay. They could advance to the GS-13 grade level in field nonsupervisory assignments at a base salary of \$75,414, which was worth \$94,268 with availability pay. FBI supervisory, management, and executive positions in grades GS-14 and GS-15 paid a base salary of about \$89,115 and \$104,826 a year, respectively, which amounted to \$111,394

or \$131,033 per year including availability pay. Salaries were slightly higher in selected areas where the prevailing local pay level was higher. Because Federal agents may be eligible for a special law enforcement benefits package, applicants should ask their recruiter for more information.

Total earnings for local, State, and special police and detectives frequently exceed the stated salary because of payments for overtime, which can be significant.

According to the International City-County Management Association's annual Police and Fire Personnel, Salaries, and Expenditures Survey, average salaries for sworn full-time positions in 2006 were:

Rank	Minimum annual base salary	Maximum annual base salary
Police chief.....	\$78,547	\$99,698
Deputy chief.....	68,797	87,564
Police captain.....	65,408	81,466
Police lieutenant.....	59,940	72,454
Police sergeant .....	53,734	63,564
Police corporal .....	44,160	55,183

In addition to the common benefits—paid vacation, sick leave, and medical and life insurance—most police and sheriffs' departments provide officers with special allowances for uniforms. Because police officers usually are covered by liberal pension plans, many retire at half-pay after 25 or 30 years of service.

### Related Occupations

Police and detectives maintain law and order, collect evidence and information, and conduct investigations and surveillance. Workers in related occupations include correctional officers, private detectives and investigators, probation officers and correctional treatment specialists, and security guards and gaming surveillance officers. Like police and detectives, firefighters and emergency medical technicians and paramedics provide public safety services and respond to emergencies.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information about entrance requirements may be obtained from Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

For general information about sheriffs and to learn more about the National Sheriffs' Association scholarship, contact:

► National Sheriffs' Association, 1450 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.sheriffs.org>

Information about qualifications for employment as a FBI Special Agent is available from the nearest State FBI office. The address and phone number are listed in the local telephone directory. Internet: <http://www.fbi.gov>

Information on career opportunities, qualifications, and training for U.S. Secret Service Special Agents and Uniformed Officers is available from the Secret Service Personnel Division at (202) 406-5800, (888) 813-877, or (888) 813-USSS.

Internet: <http://www.secretservice.gov/join>

Information about qualifications for employment as a DEA Special Agent is available from the nearest DEA office, or call (800) DEA-4288. Internet: <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea>

Information about career opportunities, qualifications, and training to become a deputy marshal is available from:

► U.S. Marshals Service, Human Resources Division—Law Enforcement Recruiting, Washington, DC 20530-1000. Internet: <http://www.usmarshals.gov>

For information on operations and career opportunities in the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, contact:

► U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, 650 Massachusetts Ave., NW., Room 8290, Washington D.C., 20226.

Internet: <http://www.atf.gov>

Information about careers in U.S. Customs and Border Protection is available from:

► U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20229. Internet: <http://www.cbp.gov>

Information about law enforcement agencies within the Department of Homeland Security is available from:

► U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528. Internet: <http://www.dhs.gov>

To find Federal, State, and local law enforcement job fairs and other recruiting events across the country, contact:

► National Law Enforcement Recruiters Association, 2045 15th St. North, Suite 210, Arlington, VA 22201.

Internet: <http://www.nlera.org>