

History

Prior to 1960, law enforcement in Suffolk County was the responsibility of local towns and villages as well as the [Suffolk County Sheriff's Office](#) and the [New York State Police](#). From the 17th century until well into the 20th century, many of these jurisdictions employed only part-time [constables](#), who were usually appointed by local communities and paid to enforce court orders. Additional fees were paid for making arrests, serving warrants and transporting prisoners. Few of these constables had any formal law enforcement training, hours were often long and pay was low.

The [New York State Police](#) arrived on [Long Island](#) in 1917, and many towns and villages began forming their own small police forces soon thereafter. Training remained inadequate, however, and none of these forces were equipped to handle serious incidents or major crimes. Communication and cooperation between forces remained spotty.

The demographic transformation of the county following [World War II](#), however, forced a change. The rapid suburbanization of those years brought with it a dramatic rise in traffic and crime that threatened to overwhelm the 33 separate law enforcement agencies then operating within Suffolk County. Voices demanding a unified county police force, similar to the one already operating in neighboring [Nassau County](#), grew louder.

Following the passage, in 1958, of state legislation creating the [county executive](#) form of government, a referendum was held on the creation of a county police force. The five western towns — [Babylon](#), [Huntington](#), [Islip](#), [Smithtown](#) and [Brookhaven](#) — voted in favor. The five eastern towns — [Riverhead](#), [Southold](#), [Shelter Island](#), [East Hampton](#), and [Southampton](#) — opted to retain their own police forces, and do so to this day, with the Suffolk County Police Department providing support and specialized services.

The towns that voted in favor thus agreed to turn over all their police functions to the new agency. In addition to traditional uniformed patrol services, the new agency agreed to provide: a Detective Bureau, a Communications Bureau, an Identification Bureau, a Central Records Bureau, and a police academy for training new officers.

All incumbent town and village police officers serving in those areas that voted to join the police district became members of the new department without further examination or qualification. In addition, [state troopers](#) serving on Long Island who so desired could request appointment to the new force. Criminal investigators in the district attorney's office were appointed the new detectives. The serving town and village police chiefs were typically appointed inspectors, deputy chiefs or assistant chiefs in the new department. The remaining positions were filled by competitive civil service examinations. The Suffolk County Police Department officially came into being on [January 1, 1960](#) with 619 sworn members