

What's the Difference Between Sheriffs and the Police?

Sheriffs, their Deputy Sheriffs, and Police Officers are all law enforcement officers certified by the State of Florida and have certain powers of arrest throughout the state. Most wear distinctive uniforms or badges, drive clearly marked patrol vehicles and often perform similar job functions, but there are several differences, too. Many of these differences involve:

- Their primary jurisdictional boundaries
- The primary funding source for their agency
- Distinct differences in their duties as designated by Florida law

Sheriff

A Sheriff is a law enforcement officer who holds public office; the voters in each county elect their Sheriff once every four years.

The Florida Constitution mandates that one Sheriff exist for each of the 67 Florida counties. Each Sheriff has countywide jurisdiction. Sheriffs appoint deputies to assist in the performance of their duties.

By statute, Sheriffs' duties include:

- Serves as a certified law enforcement officer responsible for enforcing the laws of the state and county.
- Serves warrants and civil papers

In addition, Sheriffs may operate county jails, transport prisoners to courts throughout the United States and perform many other duties. Although most county jails are operated by the county Sheriff's Office, some county jails are operated by the County Commissioners and/or private companies.

The Sheriff's Office is funded by local tax dollars administered by County Commissioners.

Police

A municipality (City, Town, Village) may create and fund a Police Department, but it is not required by law to do so. If created, the police jurisdiction extends only within the boundaries of the municipality they serve.

A Chief of Police is typically not elected; either the municipality's governing council or the City Manager appoints the Chief of Police and determines the length of their employment, as well as how many additional Police Officers to hire.

Police Officers may enforce state criminal and traffic laws and local ordinances adopted within their jurisdiction. Police are not required to keep a jail but may operate a municipal jail for housing misdemeanor violators or detainees awaiting transfer to the county jail.

Police officers do not have responsibility for transporting prisoners, serving civil process, or conducting many of the other duties designated to Sheriffs.

Jurisdiction

Sheriff's Offices and Police Departments may operate outside of their normal jurisdictional boundary under certain circumstances. One instance is if the law enforcement agency has entered into an agreement with another law enforcement agency that extends their natural jurisdictional authority. Sheriff's Offices need no agreement to enforce laws within a municipality, but municipal police do to enforce laws within the counties where they are situated within. Florida municipalities cannot be located in more than one county.