



October 6, 2021

Chicago HEAL

The shooting death of a veteran Illinois State Police trooper on the Dan Ryan Expressway has been ruled a suicide, officials said Saturday, according to the [Chicago Tribune](#). The determination was made Saturday following an autopsy for Trooper Gerald Mason, 36, who had been with the state police for 11 years, according to the Cook County medical examiner's office and police.

Trooper Mason was on duty when he was found in his police vehicle at 1:38 p.m. Friday, in the inbound lanes of the Ryan at 43rd Street. A Chicago police officer took Mason, who'd suffered one gunshot wound, to the University of Chicago Medical Center.

"This is a sad moment. We are hurting. Mason's family is hurting badly today also," said Illinois State Police Director Brendan Kelly during a Friday night news conference at McCormick Place. "We ask for your thoughts and love for his family and the Illinois State Police family."

This is a true tragedy for the Mason family and for all of us. A death like this creates trauma for all of us. How can we make sense of this, or of any deaths that occur due to suicide?

The person committing suicide often feels that there is no other alternative, that things will be better if they are gone. They often feel like they have no one to turn to, and they don't feel that there are any alternatives. BUT-- there is always someone to turn to – the question is, why do people suffer in silence?

As families who have experienced a suicide of a family member know too well, things do not get better after the person is gone. The ripple effects explode for the family, friends, and colleagues of the person who commits suicide, disrupting lives and creating additional trauma for years.

What are the warning signs for suicide? According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, they are:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities - seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped - like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious, agitated, or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States – [talk to someone now](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/) (800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)). Serious on-going suicidal thoughts are not normal, especially if there is a plan to carry them out, and these suicidal thoughts should be treated as an emergency. The person should be evaluated in the emergency room just like any other serious emergency.

Research presented in an April 2021 article in JAMA Psychiatry shows that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) populations are less likely to be screened or receive high-quality treatment for depression and more likely to experience discrimination in health care settings. Lacking access to culturally responsive and appropriate treatment, BIPOC populations may be more likely to prefer nonmedical treatment for mental health conditions. Even worse, in a study of more than a million U.S. patients, the most common screening tool used by medical professionals to assess for suicide risk works less well for Blacks and American Indian/Alaskan Natives, compared with White, Hispanic, and Asian patients, because a smaller proportion of eventual suicides are identified. We need to do better.

We must continue to identify and change racist structures that disadvantage Blacks from getting the mental health care that they need, and we need to do more to prevent suicides.

Please join me and co-hosts Meleika Gardner and Revin Fellows every Saturday from 2-3 p.m. for our radio talk show on WVON 1690 entitled 'Chicago Heal'. Our hour-long show is a campaign to push mental health healing for communities and families in Chicago. We will also appear on WCPT 820 AM on Sundays from 6-7 p.m. These shows will bring mental health experts together to help communities and families in Chicago heal from past and ongoing trauma of violence in Chicago. Here is a Facebook link introducing the show:

<https://www.facebook.com/100005177499590/posts/1864912763691289/?d=n>

Please join us by listening to the show, please call in, and let's help Chicago heal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District