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How Many Died as a Result of Capitol Riot?

By [Robert Farley](#)

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In [a tweet](#) on Oct. 24, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez referred to the Capitol riot on Jan. 6 as “a terror attack,” which she said resulted in “almost 10 dead.” She called for “any member of Congress who helped plot” it to be “expelled.”

Journalist Glenn Greenwald [commented](#) on Twitter that the claim of “‘almost 10 dead’ from the 1/6 riot is deceitful in the extreme. Four people died on 1/6: all Trump supporters.”

There is reasoned debate about the number who died as a result of the Capitol riot. Ocasio-Cortez is including law enforcement officials who responded to the Capitol that day and committed suicide in the days and months afterward. None of them have been officially designated as “line of duty” deaths, though there is some congressional support for it.

Ocasio-Cortez’s tally also includes two rally participants who died of heart failure — including one who died before other protesters had breached the Capitol. It includes a rallygoer who was initially believed to have been trampled to death in the mayhem that day, but was later determined to have died of an accidental overdose.

We take no position in the debate over whom to include in the deaths from the riots. But here we lay out what is publicly known about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the nine people included in Ocasio-Cortez’s tally.

Trump Supporters

Two heart attacks: According to an April [release](#) from the Washington, D.C., medical examiner’s office, “Stop the Steal” protesters Kevin Greeson, 55, and Benjamin Phillips, 50, both died of cardiovascular disease, and the manner of death was deemed “natural.”

According to a [ProPublica profile](#), Greeson, of Athens, Alabama, was participating in the protest outside the Capitol when he suffered a heart attack and died minutes before the first rioters breached the Capitol. The article notes that a Metropolitan Police Department incident report at the time states that Greeson “was in the area of the United States Capitol in attendance of first amendment activities” when he had a heart attack.

Once a supporter of President Barack Obama, Greeson had over the years become an ardent supporter of President Donald Trump and was convinced that the election had been stolen. While Greeson had posted social media messages in the weeks before the rally such as “Let’s take this f—ing Country BACK!! Load your guns and take to the streets!,” his family insisted to the [New York Times](#) the day after his death that “he was not there to participate in violence or rioting, nor did he condone such actions.”

In a [written statement](#) provided to the media after his death, Greeson’s wife, Kristi, stated that her husband “had a history of high blood pressure, and in the midst of the excitement, suffered a heart attack.”

The day after the riot, a D.C. Police Department [statement](#) said that Phillips, a [computer programmer](#) from Ringtown, Pennsylvania, had died due to a “medical emergency.” Like Greeson, the D.C. medical examiner [later determined](#) that Phillips died naturally of “hypertensive atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease” — [heart failure](#) due to high blood pressure.

A [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) story said Philips had organized a caravan of Trump supporters to attend the rally in Washington, but the story states, “There’s no indication Philips himself participated in the raid on the Capitol.”

An accidental overdose: D.C. police [also said](#) on the day after the riot that Rosanne Boyland, 34, of Kennisaw, Georgia, suffered a “medical emergency.” The *New York Times* [reported](#) on Jan. 15 that Boyland died “in a crush of fellow rioters during their attempt to fight through a police line, according to videos reviewed by The Times.” That narrative was furthered by [prosecutors](#) pressing criminal cases against some of the rioters who said that as rioters clashed with police, Boyland “was dying after being trampled by the mob.”

But a month later, the D.C. medical examiner’s office released its [conclusion](#) that Boyland had died accidentally of “acute amphetamine intoxication.” According to the *Washington Post*, “The drug cited in Boyland’s death is addictive and can be prescribed to treat attention-deficit disorder and narcolepsy.”

Boyland’s sister [told the Associated Press](#) that a police detective told the family that Boyland — an avid Trump supporter who subscribed to QAnon conspiracy theories — had collapsed while standing off to the side in the Capitol rotunda.

A shooting death: Ashli Babbitt, 35, of San Diego and an Air Force veteran, died on the day of the riot after being shot in the shoulder by a Capitol Police officer as she attempted to force her way into the House chamber where members of Congress were sheltering in place, according to a Jan. 7 [statement](#) from then-U.S. Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund.

In April, the Department of Justice [announced](#) that it would not pursue any charges against the Capitol Police officer who shot Babbitt.

According to the Justice Department [release](#), “As members of the mob continued to strike the glass doors” outside an entrance that leads to the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives, “Ms. Babbitt attempted to climb through one of the doors where glass was broken out. An officer inside the Speaker’s Lobby fired one round from his service pistol, striking Ms. Babbitt in the left shoulder, causing her to fall back from the doorway and onto the floor.”

The press release said the Justice Department’s investigation “revealed no evidence to establish that, at the time the officer fired a single shot at Ms. Babbitt, the officer did not reasonably believe that it was necessary to do so in self-defense or in defense of the Members of Congress and others evacuating the House Chamber.”

In August, [U.S. Capitol Police said](#) an internal investigation also cleared the officer who shot Babbitt of any wrongdoing.

Law Enforcement

Ocasio-Cortez’s statement that the Capitol attack resulted in “almost 10 dead” includes five police officers, none of whom died at the scene on Jan. 6.

A stroke victim: A Capitol Police [release](#) the day after the riots said that USCP Officer Brian Sicknick “passed away due to injuries sustained while on-duty.” The report stated that Sicknick “was injured while physically engaging with protesters. He returned to his division office and collapsed.”

The *New York Times*, citing unnamed law enforcement officials, initially reported that Sicknick was struck by a fire extinguisher, but later updated its story to say that medical experts said he did not die of blunt force trauma.

The *Washington Post* [reported](#) on April 19 that District of Columbia Chief Medical Examiner Francisco J. Diaz found that Sicknick suffered two strokes nearly eight hours after being sprayed with a chemical irritant during the riot. Diaz told the *Post* that Sicknick died of natural causes, but “all that transpired played a role in his condition.”

That day, US. Capitol Police released [a statement](#) that read: “The USCP accepts the findings from the District of Columbia’s Office of the Chief Medical Examiner that Officer Brian Sicknick died of



natural causes. This does not change the fact Officer Sicknick died in the line of duty, courageously defending Congress and the Capitol.”

Four suicides: Four other police officers committed suicide in the days and months after the riot.

The first was U.S. Capitol Police Officer [Howard Liebengood](#), 51, who had been guarding the Capitol for 15 years and was on duty at the Capitol on Jan. 6. He took his own life three days after the riots.

The following day, Trump [ordered](#) flags at the White House be lowered to half-staff in honor of both Sicknick and Liebengood.

Several days later, D.C. Police Officer Jeffrey Smith, 35, who was injured in the riots on Jan. 6, also committed suicide.

Smith’s wife, Erin, told the [Washington Post](#) her husband related to her the fear and panic he experienced the day of the assault on the Capitol, and that he was afraid he might die.

In defending the Capitol, Smith was struck on the helmet by a metal pole thrown by rioters. Later that night, his wife said he went to the police medical clinic, where he was prescribed pain medication and put on sick leave.

Smith’s wife said he “wasn’t the same” in the days after the riot and seemed to be in constant pain. After visiting a police clinic on Jan. 14 and being ordered back to work, Smith shot himself on the way to work, the [Post](#) reported.

The families of [Liebengood](#) and [Smith](#) both sought to have them recognized as “line of duty” deaths, which would afford their families [enhanced benefits](#).

In a [letter](#) sent to Rep. Jennifer Wexton of Virginia, Liebengood’s widow wrote, “After assisting riot control at the Capitol on January 6th, USCP scheduled Howie to work lengthy shifts in the immediate days following. He was home for very few hours over the course of four days. Although he was severely sleep-deprived, he remained on duty- as he was directed- practically around the clock from January 6th through the 9th. On the evening of the 9th, he took his life at our home.”

In the letter, [reported by CNN](#), Serena Liebengood concluded, “The Liebengood family wants Howie’s death to not have been in vain. Recognition of the cause of his death, much like the critical examination of the riot itself, will remain central to how we make right those tragedies and help avoid their repetition.”

The Liebengood family later provided a statement to CNN, “Howie dedicated 15 years of his life to protecting these elected officials, as well as millions of visitors at the U.S. Capitol each year. Officials on both sides of the aisle witnessed firsthand the catastrophic events of January 6. We are certain they recognize that this tragedy led to Howie’s death.”

As part of a lawsuit brought by Smith’s widow to have her husband’s suicide ruled “in the line of duty,” Jonathan L. Arden, the former chief medical examiner of the District of Columbia, provided [a declaration](#) that stated “there is hard and reliable evidence that Jeffrey Smith changed after the physical and emotional trauma he experience on January 6, 2021 as he became withdrawn and upset. These facts, together with the timing of the suicide (nine days after the trauma) strongly supports causality.”

“The acute, precipitating event that caused the death of Officer Smith was his occupational exposure to the traumatic events he suffered on January 6, 2021,” Arden wrote.

However, “line of duty” benefits are not typically granted to those who commit suicide, and the cases for both Liebengood and Smith are [still pending](#). Smith’s case, because he was a D.C. police officer, is before the D.C. Police and Firefighters’ Retirement and Relief Board. According to [D.C. law](#), survivor benefits are only provided when a death is the “sole and direct result of a personal injury sustained” while performing duty as an officer, and was not caused by “his intention to bring about his own death.”



As they storm the U.S. Capitol, Trump supporters clash with police and security forces in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 6, 2021. Credit: Roberto Schmidt/AFP via Getty Images.

But Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner and Reps. Don Beyer and Jennifer Wexton wrote in [a letter](#) to D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser that an exception for Smith ought to be made “both as a legal and a practical matter.”

“As a legal matter, Officer Smith’s symptoms were clearly the ‘sole and direct result of a personal injury’ since he had never experienced these symptoms prior to being attacked on January 6,” the letter states. “He cannot have had intent to bring about his own death if he was not in control of his actions due to severe brain trauma, any more than someone who suffers a medical emergency while driving and inadvertently crashes can be said to have had intent to bring about their own death.”

Kaine [told NBC News](#) that if the board did not make an exception for Smith, he would consider legislation that would include suicide as a line-of-duty death.

Since he was a member of the Capitol Police, Liebengood’s case is pending before the federal Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs. The families of Liebengood and Smith may also be eligible for additional federal benefits if their deaths are determined to have been “in the line of duty.”

[Other](#) elected officials have also lobbied for Smith and Liebengood to get the “line of duty” designation, and legislation was [introduced](#) in May to extend federal benefits to “public safety officers who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or acute stress disorder following a stressful situation while on duty.” The legislation has not progressed out of committee.

In May, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [introduced legislation](#) to award congressional gold medals to the U.S. Capitol Police and the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department for their efforts in protecting the Capitol on Jan. 6. The text of the legislation specifically notes the “sacrifice of heroes including Capitol Police Officers Brian Sicknick and Howard Liebengood, Metropolitan Police Department Officer Jeffrey Smith.”

The legislation passed the House [406-21](#), (most of the “no” votes were from Republicans who [objected](#) to the use of the term “insurrection” to describe the events on Jan. 6), and it passed by [unanimous consent](#) in the Senate. It was [signed into law](#) by President Joe Biden on Aug. 5.

In July, six months after the riot at the Capitol, two Metropolitan Police Department officers who responded to the Capitol on Jan. 6 committed suicide.

According to [People magazine](#), Kyle DeFreytag, 26, was not involved with the clashes with rioters during the breach of the Capitol, but was deployed to the Capitol to help enforce the curfew put in place after the mob had been cleared from the building.

The same day the Metropolitan Police Department announced DeFreytag’s death, it confirmed that another officer, Gunther Hashida, had also committed suicide.

Metropolitan Police Department spokesperson Kristen Metzger [told CNN](#) that Hashida was assigned to the emergency response team within the special operations division and had helped secure the Capitol on Jan. 6.

On Aug. 2, the [Washington Post](#) reported: “Authorities drew no connection between the riot and his death. An official familiar with the investigation said Hashida had struggles beyond Jan. 6 that could have played a role.”

Robert J. Contee III, the chief of the Metropolitan Police Department, said “that he could not say whether the riot was the cause of the suicides,” the [New York Times](#) reported.

At the start of a [press briefing](#) on Aug. 3, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki honored the two officers.

“I wanted to take a moment to recognize the passing of Metropolitan Police Officer Gunther Hashida and Officer Kyle DeFreytag — two officers who bravely defended the Capitol, both during and after the insurrection on January 6th,” Psaki said. “Their deaths are a sad reminder of that shameful day in our country’s history and of the physical and mental scars left on the officers who risked their lives to protect our Capitol and our democracy.”

Update, March 21, 2022: On March 7, the District of Columbia’s Police and Firefighters’ Retirement and Relief Board [declared](#) that Metropolitan Police Officer Jeffrey Smith’s suicide in the days after the Jan. 6 riot was a line-of-duty death. The board [concluded](#) “that Officer Smith sustained a personal injury on January 6, 2021, while performing his duties and that his injury was the sole and direct cause of his death.” As a result, Smith’s widow, Erin Smith, [will receive](#) an annuity equal to 100% of her husband’s salary.

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