



Obscure policy lets Mass. state workers keep names and pay a secret



CHRISTINA ANDREOLI

You won't find Trooper Ali Rei's name in the state's online payroll database.

By [Todd Wallack](#)

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Since last fall, Massachusetts State Police Trooper Ali Rei's name and photo have been everywhere. Several top State Police officials [resigned](#) after supervisors allegedly ordered Rei and a colleague to whitewash reports with seamy details on the arrest of a judge's daughter.

But there's one place you won't find the trooper's name: the state's online [payroll database](#).

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Despite promises to fully disclose pay for public workers, Massachusetts has continued to hide the names and compensation for many state workers like Rei, accounting for at least tens of million of dollars a year.

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One primary reason: an obscure state policy that allows employees to request their pay be kept secret if they or a relative have ever been a victim of a crime.

“It’s clearly problematic,” said Pam Wilmot, executive director of Common Cause Massachusetts, which promotes open government. “It’s concerning there are so many omissions in the database. A big part of holding government accountable is tracking expenses, and salaries is a big part of that.”

State officials have boasted about their transparency efforts since launching the state’s first online spending website seven years ago. The state has traditionally listed workers’ names, titles, departments, and pay, but doesn’t disclose other information such as home addresses or phone numbers. In addition, attorneys for the State Police have repeatedly claimed that the pay for all of their employees is posted online.

But in March, the Globe [found the state](#) failed to disclose the pay for an entire division of State Police officers assigned to Logan Airport, including two who earned more than \$300,000 a year. And the state acknowledged that it had understated the pay for hundreds more.

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Officials quickly vowed to correct the problem. But one of the state's top fiscal officers is now acknowledging that the state has continued to leave many other workers off the site.

Comptroller Thomas Shack's office said a 2007 [state policy](#), created jointly by the state comptroller's office and human resources division, allows workers to request their information be withheld if they or a family member have been victims of any crime prosecuted in court.

State employees can also shield their information if they say they are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or rape.

As of April, Shack's office said this policy covered 427 people earning a total of \$27 million in salaries alone — not including overtime, bonuses, or other pay. The policy is so broad that many other workers could potentially qualify.

The state doesn't place any restrictions on when the crime occurred or require workers to demonstrate there is any risk to having their names or pay disclosed.

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It's not clear who the 427 workers are, where they work, or how much they earned last year. In response to a public records request from the Globe, the comptroller's office only provided their base salaries — which showed 33 earn more than \$100,000 per year, including one earning \$214,500 — but withheld the workers' names, titles, departments, and full pay.

Shack said his office couldn't provide more details because they could be used to identify specific employees. "The rights of the individual are not surrendered simply because someone is a public employee," Shack said.

Governor Charlie Baker's administration said 612 people have been approved as of late July for the exemption since the program started 11 years ago, but declined to say how many (if any) have been rejected.

A State Police spokesman said a "very small number" of State Police employees are missing from the online payroll database, but was not more specific.

Like the comptroller's office, State Police cited a law restricting the release of information about people who provide family planning services — like people who work at Planned Parenthood — or have been the victims of crimes.

A Boston media attorney who has handled public records cases said that the law was clearly intended to protect crime victims — not to shield the pay of government workers.

"When you sign up to work for the government, you relinquish whatever privacy rights you have to your

salary because it is paid for by taxpayers,” Jeffrey Pyle said.

In addition, Shack said the state’s online payroll site excludes work-study students — which could potentially include thousands of people — because federal law restricts access to certain educational records. And he said it is possible other employees are missing because of errors or other reasons. The Globe confirmed that at least two state troopers, including Rei, were missing from the state’s database. Rei did not return a call seeking comment.

Her attorney, Leonard Kesten, said he did not know why she was not listed on the state’s payroll site. Kesten said he thought the names and pay for state workers were required to be made available under the state public records law.

Still, both the comptroller’s office and State Police rejected requests for the two troopers’ 2017 payroll records. The secretary of state’s office, which handles public records appeals, [ordered the State Police](#) on Aug. 9 to turn over the records, but the department has yet to comply.

Even if the state felt it couldn’t publish the names of certain employees online, one watchdog questioned why it couldn’t leave the rest of their information in the online database, such as the workers’ departments, titles, and total pay.

“The public expects that payroll records disclosed are complete and accurate,” said Mary Z. Connaughton, government transparency director for the nonprofit Pioneer Institute.

Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Todd Wallack can be reached at twallack@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@twallack](#).

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