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**State Police force shrinks, while workload grows**

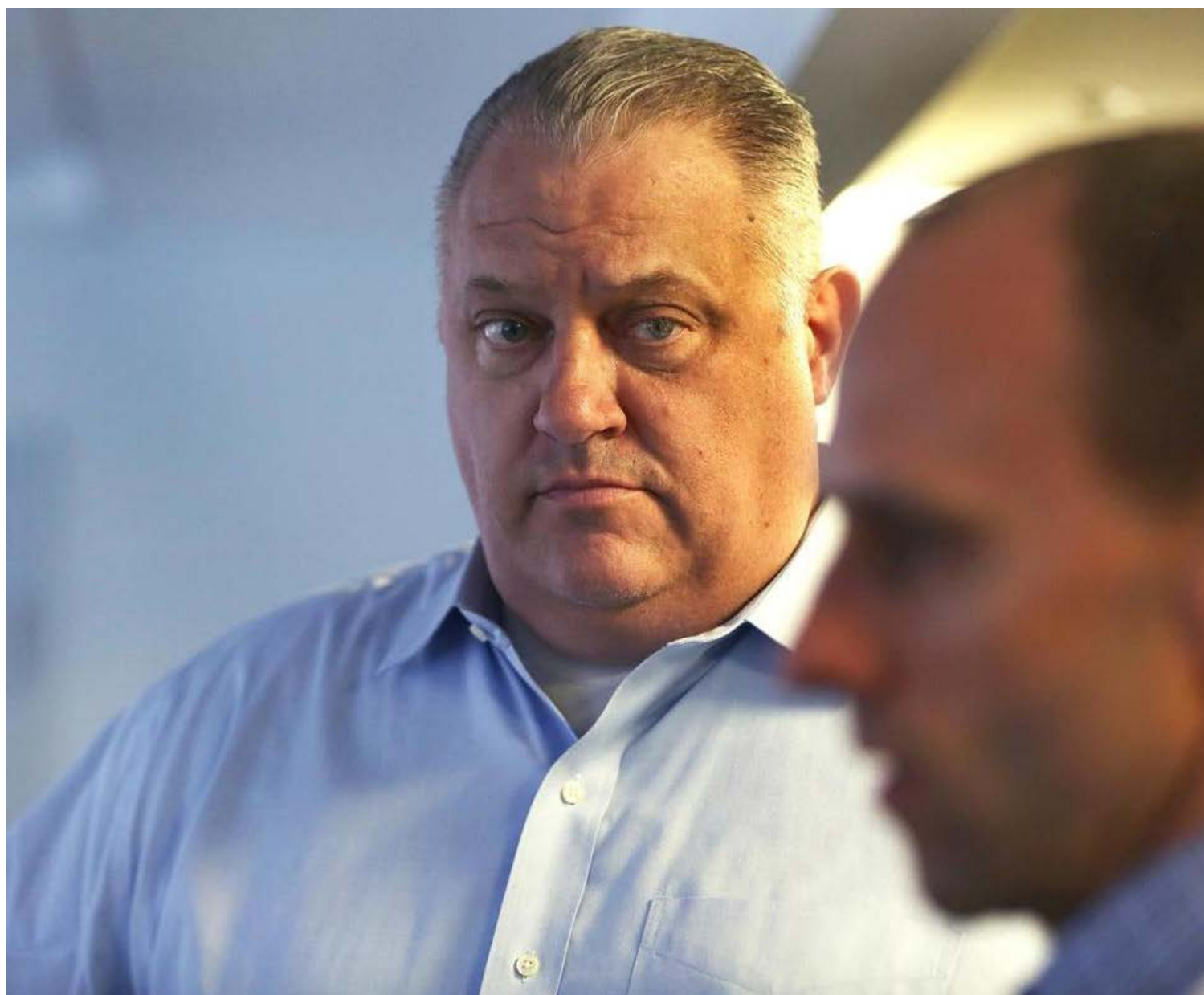








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**Former union chief Dana Pullman criticized media vilification of troopers.**

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 01, 2018

Massachusetts State Police troopers are retiring at a record clip this year, pushing staff levels lower even as the department is trying to both expand its operations and rein in overtime costs.

The agency, mired in scandals and battling low morale, has no plan, or funding set aside, to start hiring replacements, who take months to vet and train.

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Law enforcement experts say the retirement surge, coupled with the agency's growing workload, could cost taxpayers money, imperil public safety, or both.

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“When you lose troopers, you either have to spend overtime to replace the things they were doing or you have to stop the things they were doing and have less of a presence in those areas,” said policing expert Robert Wasserman. Often “it ends up being a mix.”

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Through mid-September, 111 sworn officers — from rank-and-file troopers to top veteran officers — had left the department, a figure well above what the agency typically loses in an entire year, according to

department statistics.

During the last decade, the most departures in a single year was 125 in 2008, well below the agency's trajectory this year, especially given the customary spike in retirements as the end of the year approaches.

"It's a real challenge, and it's something people should be concerned about," added Wasserman, who runs a Massachusetts-based public safety consulting firm.

About 20 of this year's departures were linked to recent controversies. Most of them were connected to the overtime scandal, which is the focus of an internal audit as well as federal and state criminal probes that have charged eight current or former members with embezzlement or fraud.

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Other retirements this year were expected, according to State Police spokesman David Procopio. He attributed many departures to troopers either reaching retirement eligibility recently or already-eligible members reaching benchmarks to collect higher pensions.

Procopio said staffing levels are lower than the department wants and it will continue seeking funding for recruits. In the meantime, he said, the agency has moved to make its operations more efficient and isn't shying away from its duties.

"The tremendous majority of MSP personnel who do their jobs every day with integrity, courage, and professionalism are more motivated than ever to show that they are what this department is truly about," Procopio said in an e-mail.

But the union representing most of the force has cited dismal morale for the troopers' departures.

"Despite the fact that many of the scandals have emanated from missteps by Massachusetts State Police management and a very small percentage of troopers, the average trooper has been vilified by the media," said Dana Pullman, then head of the union, in a recent e-mail. Pullman made the statement about two weeks before he [abruptly resigned](#) Friday from his post as union president amid a federal investigation into possible illegal reimbursement of campaign donations by union members.

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“If our leadership doesn’t stand up for every trooper doing the right thing, then we will continue to lose some of our best and brightest.” Pullman added. “The ongoing challenges in the department will likely encourage more retirements.”

Former members and experts said there probably is also concern among troopers about fewer opportunities for overtime and raises, given the recent public scrutiny.

The exodus of troopers this year has cost the agency nearly \$4.9 million in one-time payouts to outgoing troopers for unused time-off benefits.

The retirements come as agency leaders are vowing to cut overtime amid allegations of payroll fraud and public outcry over hefty payouts.

Through August, overtime spending was down by about \$2.6 million, or 7 percent, compared to the same period last year, despite the retirements.

But union officials say the department needs to hire more troopers if it wants to eliminate waste on overtime, because the personnel shortage and growing responsibilities force the agency to backfill patrols with overtime shifts.

What’s more, “the reduced manpower potentially compromises the Commonwealth’s ability to meet its public safety needs on a daily basis — notwithstanding the concerns presented in the event of a disaster or catastrophic event,” Pullman told lawmakers in a May letter.

There are about 2,150 troopers employed department-wide, though dozens of those members are unavailable to work because they’re suspended or on injured leave.

The agency has repeatedly said it needs at least 2,500 troopers, citing studies by outside researchers and staff in the early 1990s and mid-2000s. The department reached the 2,500-trooper level only once, in 2007.

State Police officials say there is no room in the agency’s \$339 million annual budget to fund recruits and they must instead rely on lawmakers to approve additional funding. This summer, legislators rejected calls by the department and Governor Charlie Baker for \$5.2 million to fund a new class.

The Legislature has funded eight recruit classes since 2001, an average of about one every other year. The most recent class joined in January.

As troopers have bolted, the workload has grown.

To keep up with policing the state’s blooming casino industry, the agency’s Gaming Enforcement Unit will soon have on staff 40-plus troopers, up from just a handful a few years ago. Another 10 positions were created this spring in internal inspection and investigatory units; a Division of Homeland Security and Preparedness launched last year added 25 more spots.

Meanwhile, the State Police has refused requests from Boston police to share policing duties in the city’s now-bustling Seaport area.

Specialists said the department may now need to consider relinquishing some responsibilities.

“Sometimes departments recognize that they can’t do everything,” said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington D.C.-based think tank.

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