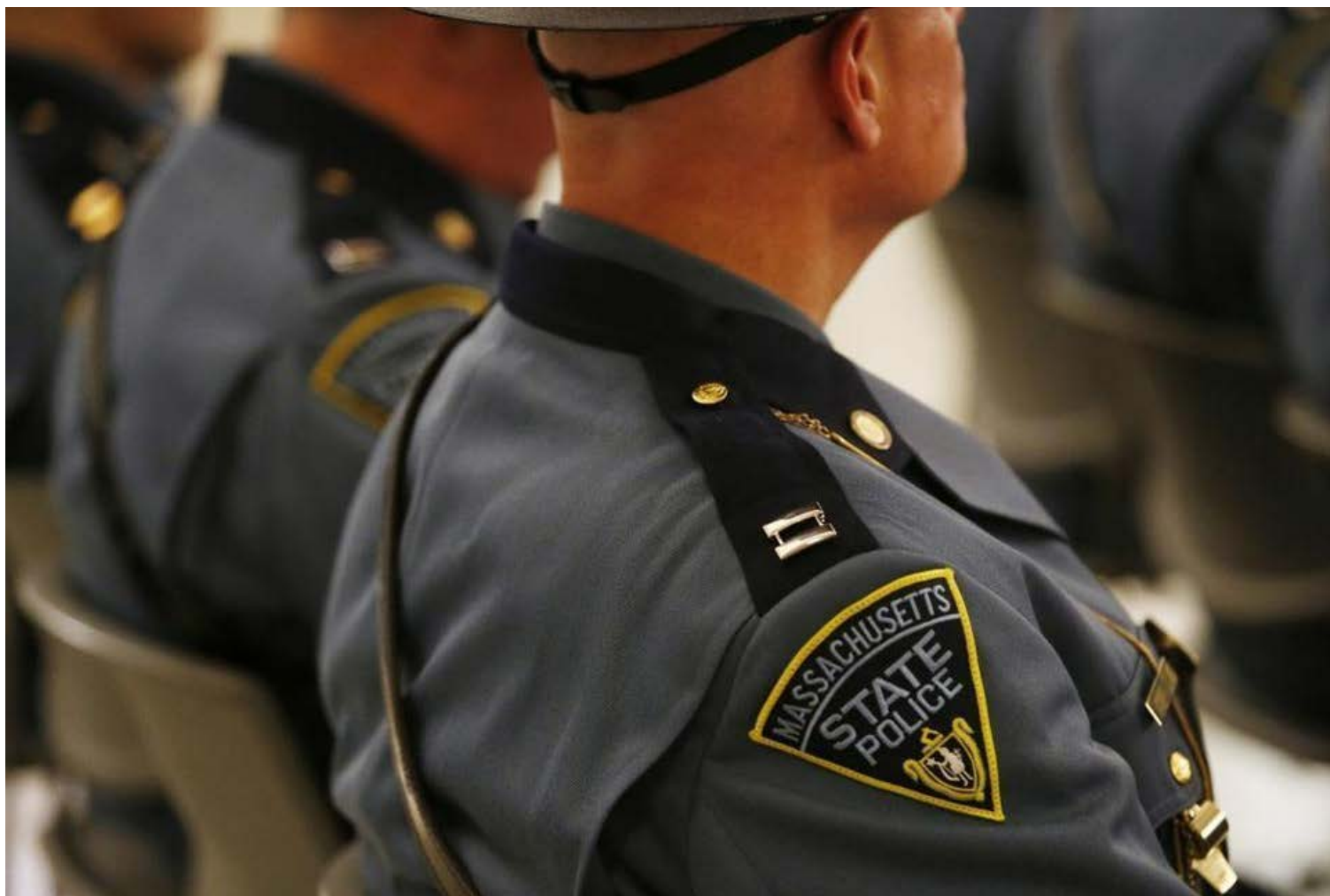




State Police payroll dipped last year but is expected to increase in 2019



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2018

Massachusetts State Police payroll spending declined during 2018.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Under fire for a wide-ranging overtime fraud scandal, the Massachusetts State Police curbed payroll spending — slightly — during 2018 for the first time in years, a Globe review of state records shows. The overall dip included a significant reduction in overtime, which department officials attributed to reforms intended to rein in such spending.

Other factors fueling the overall decrease included a record number of retirements and stalled union negotiations, which meant troopers had to go without raises for the first time in years.

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But don't expect last year's decreases to be the start of a trend. The department's payroll appears poised to climb in 2019, department officials said, citing a wave of incoming recruits and the potential for a new union contract. And even with last year's decline, the department's payroll — and the hefty sums some individual troopers collect — continues to raise eyebrows.

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Mary Connaughton, government transparency director at the Boston think tank, Pioneer Institute, said she had “serious concerns” about how much overtime some troopers collected, in some cases more than their base pay.

“First, in working all those hours, fatigue surely must set in. Is the public adequately protected?” she said. “Secondly, in light of the recent scandals, how can the public be assured the new controls over payroll are working?”

The department spent \$370.6 million overall on payroll last year, according to new [data](#) from the state comptroller's office. That's about 1.6 percent less than the record-setting \$376.8 million it doled out in 2017 but also more than in any prior year and 25 percent higher than 2010's payroll.

Last year's overall dip included a 4 percent drop in detail and “other” pay from \$49.2 million in 2017 to \$47.1 million last year, while overtime spending plunged 10 percent, from \$59.3 million in 2017 to \$53.3 million.

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The average State Police employee pay, \$114,764, is the highest of any state agency by a wide margin — the next closest, the Executive Office of Education, is nearly \$20,000 lower.

And a large number of troopers collected eye-popping sums.

At least 212 troopers — or about 10 percent of the 2,100-member agency — took home more than \$200,000.

That included at least one member who collected more than \$300,000.

Sergeant Michael Fiore, who works in Troop F, which patrols Logan International Airport and Boston's Seaport, received \$315,992 last year, including \$167,281 in overtime pay plus \$15,895 from details and other pay. In 2017, he made \$311,040.

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The number of highly paid troopers could not be calculated because the state released payroll in two lists that could not be merged and checked.

In addition, an [obscure policy](#) allows state employees to request their pay be kept secret if they or a relative have ever been a crime victim. As of April, this policy covered 427 state workers.

State Police spokesman David Procopio attributed the overall drop in payroll spending to “a combination of a slightly higher than normal pace of retirements and sworn personnel staffing approximately 500

troopers below the ideal level, along with the absence of a new CBA [collective bargaining agreement].” Procopio said the cut in overtime spending was because of [a series of reforms](#) the department made after the fraud scandal erupted, including “greater oversight by supervisors, the addition of more troopers to the Logan Airport [Troop F] barracks, and the redistribution of other troopers to busy areas made possible by the closing of Troop E and reorganization of its patrol areas.”

Troop E, which patrolled the Massachusetts Turnpike, was the epicenter of the scandal and disbanded this spring. All 46 troopers accused so far worked for Troop E, about a third of its membership.

The department has accused those troopers of collecting pay for hours they never worked and writing phony “ghost” traffic citations to cover up absences during 2016.

The department is still reviewing records for other years.

Some accused troopers were suspended without pay. Others retired and are [collecting pensions](#), which the state says it can’t move to revoke unless a person is convicted of a crime related to their employment and until court proceedings end.

The department has shared evidence with state and federal prosecutors, leading to [criminal charges against 10 troopers](#). Seven of them — including a former shift commander — have pleaded guilty and face the likelihood of time in prison and having their pensions stripped. The criminal investigations are ongoing.

Hints of the scandal first surfaced in the spring of 2017 when one trooper was accused of putting in for phony overtime pay and was suspended.

It took nine months, and questions from WCVB-TV, before department officials announced last January that they had “launched an investigation into payroll discrepancies.”

The [Globe reported this summer](#) how, for years, State Police had been confronted internally with many red flags signaling potential payroll fraud — including troopers exceeding the department’s weekly limits on work hours — but there was scant evidence issues were addressed.

Procopio said the department last year “fulfilled our important mission to protect our citizens while continuing to increase accountability and oversight, control overtime costs, and implement wide-ranging fiscal and operational reforms.”

“The administration will continue to work with [State Police Colonel Kerry Gilpin] to restore accountability at the department,” Sarah Finlaw, a spokeswoman for Governor Charlie Baker, said in a statement.

The department launched other reforms in the spring, including publishing payroll records for a [particularly well-paid division](#) consisting of 140 troopers — Troop F — that were previously [hidden from public view](#). Doing so revealed a [generous perk](#) for which the [state had failed to pay taxes](#).

Some changes [have been questioned](#), while others have [not yet been put into effect](#), including a vow to conduct and publicly release quarterly audits of top-paid troopers.

Meanwhile, [controversies](#) have continued to arise, including [federal investigations into union leaders' finances](#), [additional pay abuse allegations](#), and revelations that the department [tried several times to destroy large volumes of payroll records](#) amid the ongoing investigations — problems that have caused [morale to plummet and retirements to spike](#).

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