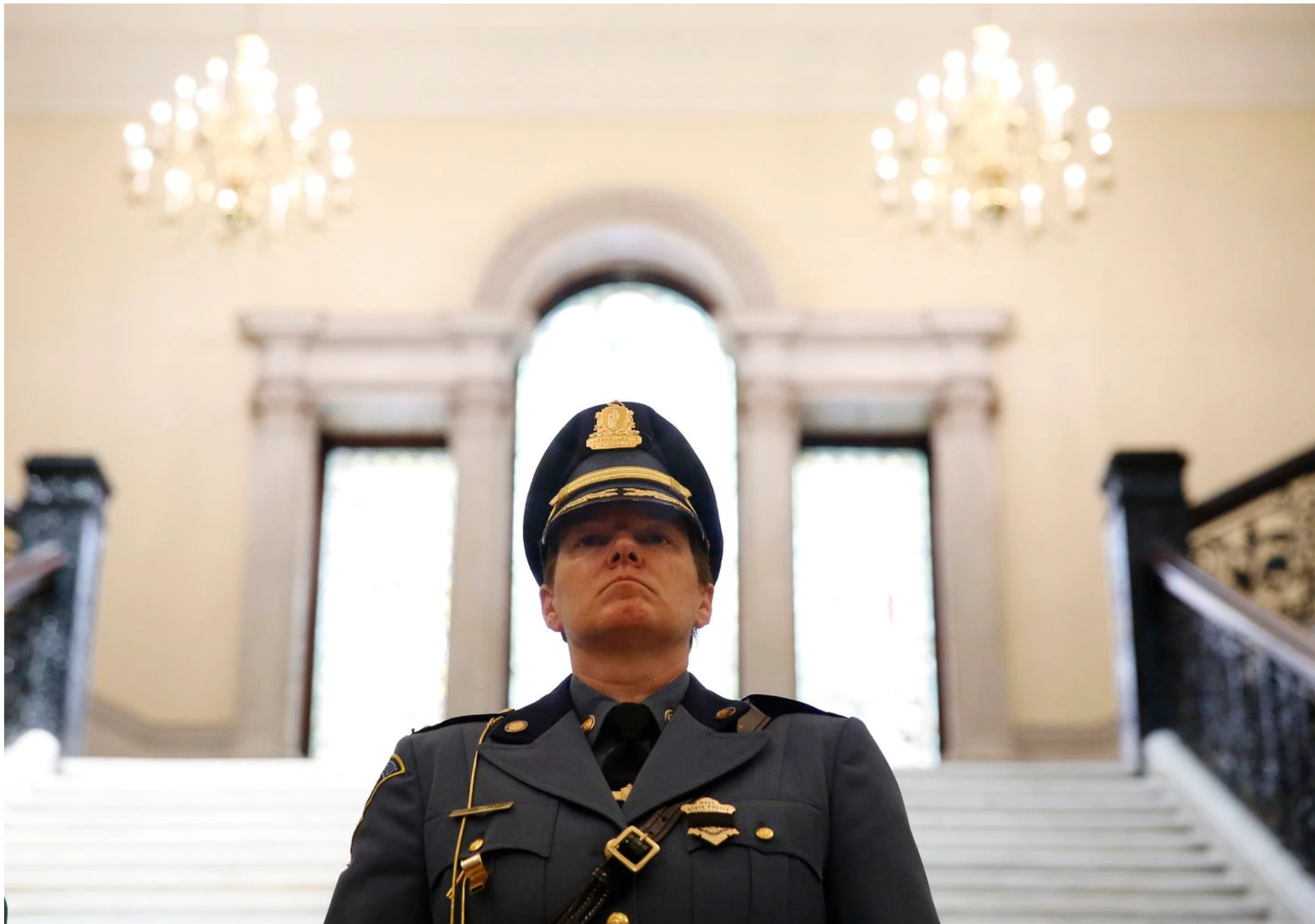




Bruins 3, Penguins 4, Final

State Police head stays in the shadows amid unrelenting scandals

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) and [Matt Stout](#) Globe Staff, October 8, 2019, 2:12 p.m.



Massachusetts State Police Colonel Kerry A. Gilpin. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE/2018/GLOBE STAFF

Massachusetts State Police Colonel Kerry A. Gilpin was quiet after a federal judge suggested that troopers accused of defrauding the department [should be charged in a conspiracy case](#), just like mobsters.

She didn't directly address revelations that the department [destroyed key records](#) in the sprawling fraud probe. And after allegations surfaced [that supervisors were running an illegal ticket quota](#) system? Gilpin kept her head down.

Cases of trooper misconduct have [plunged](#) the State Police force into crisis after crisis during her nearly two-year tenure atop the agency. Throughout, she has kept a remarkably low profile, and repeatedly refused to answer questions about the lax oversight, systemic cultural problems, and corruption cited by federal prosecutors and others.

Outside of scant statements and a pair of press conferences early last year — one alongside her boss, Governor Charlie Baker — Gilpin has not directly addressed the still-ongoing federal investigation, detailed where the reforms stand, or laid out a long-term vision for the agency. Gilpin's approach, according to some observers, isn't helping the agency's quest to regain the public's trust.

“You have to be more out there,” said Dennis Galvin, president of the Massachusetts Association for Professional Law Enforcement and a retired State Police major. “She has to open that department up and demonstrate the changes she's making and explain the changes she's making so people have a real strong sense something's being done.

“And that hasn't been happening.”

In a statement, State Police spokesman David Procopio praised Gilpin, saying she is a detail-oriented leader who has prioritized running the department, “strengthening partnerships” with other agencies, and making daily calls and meetings with officials, community groups, and others.

Baker, whose office has been intimately involved in the public relations messaging regarding State Police, also lauded her work.

“I think the colonel’s approach to the job is to perform the task at hand,” he said last week. “She’s out. I’ve been at events with her. I know she’s out. And I think in many respects her view is, focus on the work and let it speak for itself. And I support that.”

The agency doesn’t regularly advertise her schedule, however, and while officials say she’s attended more than a half-dozen public events since the spring, none touched on the department’s efforts to address the looming scandals. In one case — a news conference to detail security measures at Boston’s Fourth of July celebration — Gilpin didn’t speak.

The State Police’s official Facebook page, which promotes upbeat department news and events, had made many more references in recent months to police K-9s than to Gilpin.

And Gilpin has refused more than a dozen Globe interview requests, including for this story, since taking over the state’s largest law enforcement agency in late 2017. When a Globe reporter again asked for an interview at State Police headquarters last week, a department official turned it down, adding he was unaware of Gilpin making any public appearances through the rest of the week.

Her next event? A Wednesday appearance at the Massachusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center, where she’ll read a book about a courageous kitten for [“Story Time with the Colonel!”](#) The event is limited to children ages 3 through 5.

Chiefs and colonels trying to pull a department out of crisis need to be “very vocal and visible,” said Ronal Serpas, who led the New Orleans Police Department through the early stages of a federal consent decree prompted by high-profile

abuse and corruption cases.

“You have to send a message to the community, which also speaks to your employees, which also speaks to your critics,” said Serpas, now a professor at Loyola University New Orleans. “If you’re the boss, you have to be out front. You just have to be. That’s how your troopers will hear from you. You can’t talk to all of them.”

He added: “And if you ain’t talking, then somebody is talking for you.”

Procopio, the agency spokesman, said that under Gilpin, the State Police — which last week announced the creation of a [new unsolved case unit](#) — has formed the “strongest bond ever” with victim advocates and families of homicide victims, and has made “significant progress” on reforms. Those include adding GPS trackers to trooper vehicles, launching a body camera program, and conducting audits of the department’s top earners.

“Colonel Gilpin continues to demonstrate her vision for the department through her constant interactions with the public, other law enforcement leaders, and the Commonwealth’s communities,” Procopio said.

However, several reforms Gilpin and Baker promised 18 months ago remain [unfulfilled](#) to this day.

Criticism of the department has come from all corners recently, including a federal judge who called the fraud scandal a widespread “conspiracy,” and questioned why prosecutors didn’t pursue charges typically used against mobsters.

During her tenure, recruitment and promotion practices have come under fire following complaints of [discrimination](#) and revelations the agency [hired an admitted drug dealer](#) as a trooper. Department officials have [hidden](#), [destroyed](#), and [lost track of](#) records that could have exposed wrongdoing. The department’s head of payroll [pleaded guilty](#) to embezzling thousands of dollars from the agency.

The biggest scandal centers on 46 troopers who were implicated in a [widespread payroll fraud scheme](#), 10 of whom have been criminally charged. An internal probe — which was initiated months before Gilpin became colonel but officials say she expanded — flagged the troopers. Gilpin referred the case to prosecutors.

Years before the fraud became public, department leaders, including Gilpin, when she was an internal inspector, encountered a host of [warning signs](#), but there's scant evidence they acted to address them.

In a brief phone interview with the Globe last year, Gilpin, whose annual salary is \$241,845, acknowledged noticing potential problems as an internal inspector, but said her role then was merely to document the issues, which she did.

Gilpin, 49, joined the State Police in 1994, having turned to a career in law enforcement after the 1986 murder of her sister, Tracy, whose killing went long unsolved until [an arrest](#) was made four months after Gilpin became colonel.

A sergeant in 2013, she was promoted several times in subsequent years. In her last role, she was a deputy division commander overseeing internal affairs and the State Police training academy.

But her ascension to the top of the 2,200-member force wasn't expected, not even by her.

In late 2017, e-mails indicate, Gilpin was on vacation in the Dominican Republic when [news broke](#) that then-colonel Richard McKeon and other top commanders had ordered troopers to scrub embarrassing information from an arrest report concerning a judge's daughter. McKeon [resigned](#), and Gilpin was sworn in as colonel the following week.

She was surprised to be offered the top job, according to a story in the [Harvard Gazette](#), a publication of the university's public relations office. Gilpin completed an executive education program at Harvard in 2017, and the program [named](#) her its leader of the year in 2018.

State Representative Christopher M. Markey e-mailed Gilpin after she appeared at a March 2018 [press conference](#) announcing allegations of widespread overtime fraud: “I know these are difficult times but consider yourself as the ‘correction’ for years of avoiding issues.”

In a phone interview, Markey said he still thinks Gilpin is doing a good job.

“Right now you need someone who’s a do-er and she’s doing,” said Markey, adding that “she’s spending more time fixing things.”

State Representative Timothy R. Whelan, a former state trooper who’s known Gilpin for close to two decades, described her as methodical in her approach.

“There’s an old saying: You have show horses and workhorses,” Whelan said. “And Colonel Gilpin, for certain, is a workhorse. She’s doing the work behind the scenes. She doesn’t feel the need to be in front of the cameras.”

He pointed specifically to the department’s use of social media, where it promotes the work of its troopers and its K-9 unit.

“That’s more important to get out,” he said.

Former Boston police commissioner Kathleen O’Toole, whom Gilpin [recruited](#) as an unpaid consultant to the State Police, declined this month to comment about the colonel’s job performance.

But in April she told the Globe that Gilpin had been working hard to make important changes. O’Toole said she thought the State Police should be more transparent and improve its communication.

“They need to work harder at telling their own story . . . so the community will see that the organization is moving in the right direction,” said O’Toole, who held leadership roles within and overseeing the State Police in the 1990s. “That’s difficult to do when historical cases are front and center in the news.”

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