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# State Police overtime spending surges to nearly \$58 million in 2019

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 9, 2020, 10:46 a.m.



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Overtime spending at the Massachusetts State Police surged by about 9.3 percent to \$57.8 million in 2019, according to new data from the state comptroller's office.

That helped drive an increase in the number of high-paid troopers at the agency, which has been under scrutiny for nearly two years in the wake of a wide-ranging scandal over [overtime fraud](#) and other allegations of pay theft that ensnared dozens of sworn officers.

Last year, some 325 troopers took home \$200,000 or more, representing about 15 percent of the department's 2,200-member force.

Former state inspector general Gregory Sullivan, now a research director at the Pioneer Institute, said the figures show that "overtime at the State Police is a problem that still has to be addressed beyond the [fraud] scandal."

Various rules and contract provisions at the agency "make it very easy for people to make large amounts of overtime," Sullivan said. "The State Police make great efforts to allow their officers and ranking officers to earn overtime. The State Police in some ways operates to provide overtime."

As in previous years, the department spent more money on overtime in 2019 than any other state agency, except for the MBTA, which employs more than twice as many people. Last year, 23 troopers made more than \$100,000 just from overtime pay.

The State Police have the highest average pay per employee of any state agency by a wide margin — \$126,929. The next closest agency pay average is more than \$25,000 lower.

Department spokesman David Procopio attributed the overtime spending hike to an increased workload for the agency coupled with reduced staffing levels due to a surge in troopers retiring over the past two years. There were 51 fewer troopers, on average, in 2019 than in 2018, he said.

“We continue to fulfill a full-service policing mission that in recent years has grown to include increased homeland security duties, new task forces to combat opioid and other drug trafficking, and new gaming enforcement and human trafficking units,” Procopio said.

“While these responsibilities have only increased, the number of sworn officers has fluctuated, and when the volume of retirements increases there is necessarily a corresponding need for overtime spending to meet these critically important safety duties,” he added.

Despite the increase in overtime spending last year, the department’s overall payroll spending dipped slightly by about 0.7 percent to \$366 million, marking the [second straight](#) year-over-year decline.

Procopio said “the Department has been able to keep payroll costs relatively stable because of several recent recruit classes funded by the administration, including the class of 271 recruits who began training Monday.”

Also contributing to the overall spending dip: Stalled union negotiations have left troopers without contractual raises for two years and counting. Procopio said union members recently voted to ratify a new contract, but final funding is pending.

The union, the State Police Association of Massachusetts, or SPAM, said in a statement its members “stepped up last year to ensure public safety when the reduced number of troopers was the leading contributing factor to the rate of overtime.”

The union's statement said, "Even when this new class graduates, the number of troopers will remain below what SPAM considers necessary to reduce the current strain on its members."

The highest-paid member for the second consecutive year was Sergeant Michael Fiore, who works in Troop F, which patrols Logan International Airport and Boston's Seaport. He received \$307,862 in 2019, including \$161,566 in overtime pay plus \$14,580 from details and other pay. His base pay was \$131,715.

"He is a highly-experienced officer who provides an important field leadership function and is a valuable mentor to younger troopers," Procopio said. "As with all personnel, his payroll is routinely monitored by a Troop supervisor who has ensured that he is in compliance with the allowed work hours for any given week. Furthermore, his earnings have been audited as part of the Department's quarterly review of highest earners, a process that has also verified compliance and attendance."

Sullivan said such numbers raise eyebrows.

"I question how it's possible for someone to make \$175,000 extra in pay. When do you sleep?," he said. "There's a safety issue with it. You don't want overworked and tired troopers and officers of the State Police."

David Tuerck, a Suffolk University economics professor and president of the Beacon Hill Institute, a conservative research center, said agencies with such high overtime spending like State Police should make changes. "These agencies should crack down on overtime pay and, where necessary, take on more full-time workers, letting newly hired lower-level workers pitch in where needed."

In a statement, a spokeswoman for Governor Charlie Baker highlighted efforts his administration has made to reform fiscal and operational aspects of the State Police, including regularly auditing top earners and funding four new recruit

classes to increase staffing levels.

"The administration will continue to work with Colonel [Christopher] Mason to increase transparency and accountability at the department," Baker's spokeswoman, Sarah Finlaw, said.

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