

Two former State Police supervisors indicted on federal fraud, theft charges in alleged yearslong payroll scheme

By **Matt Rocheleau** and **Milton J. Valencia** Globe Staff, Updated December 11, 2020, 10:41 a.m.



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Federal agents arrested two retired Massachusetts State Police supervisors Friday morning on conspiracy, fraud, and theft charges, alleging they oversaw a years-long scheme to steal tens of thousands of dollars in overtime pay, and later destroyed records to cover their tracks.

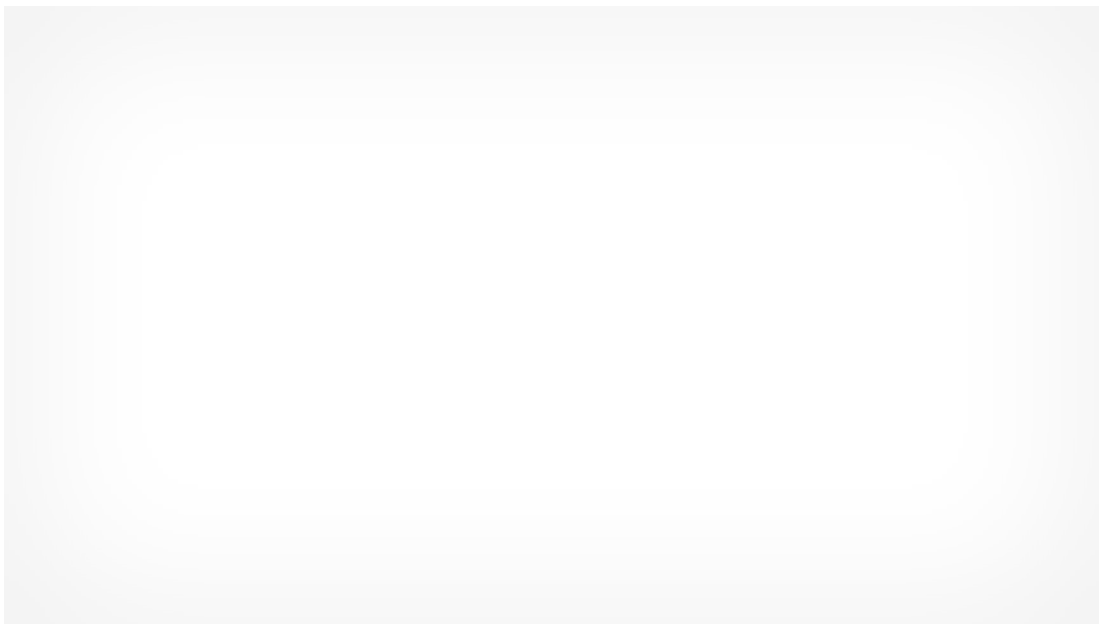
This is a separate and now second case of widespread overtime fraud uncovered by federal authorities in the past three years, and represents yet another black eye for the state's largest law enforcement agency, which, despite pledges of reform, has been unable to emerge from [a cloud of scandal](#).

Retired State Police lieutenant Daniel J. Griffin, 57, of Belmont, and retired sergeant William W. Robertson, 58, of Westborough, appeared in court Friday on charges including theft of federal funds and wire fraud. Both men pleaded not guilty and were released in lieu of bail.

Federal investigators allege Griffin and Robertson and at least three other troopers in the unit they ran collected pay for portions of overtime shifts they never worked, including when they were supposed to have been manning sobriety roadblocks and checkpoints to screen for drunken drivers.

US Attorney Andrew E. Lelling said Friday that the 2,300 member agency has “a cultural problem” and “must do a better job self-policing” itself.

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“I know it’s not lost on the State Police that they have to stop doing this,” Lelling said. “It just seems they haven’t been entirely successful yet.”

In this latest case, State Police investigators overlooked payroll irregularities and red flags within the Traffic Programs Section overseen by Griffin and Robertson, according to internal inspection reports obtained by the Globe. There is no indication the agency acted on the discrepancies. In fact, internal inspectors lauded Griffin for his leadership.

Those reports stand in stark contrast to the federal indictment, which outlines a small, rogue unit that operated on State Police headquarters campus and, for at least four years, collected overtime pay for no-show shifts and cut corners.

Earlier this fall, upon learning that federal investigators were asking questions amid a grand jury probe, Griffin ordered a trooper: “Don’t tell them [expletive] anything,” according to the indictment.

State Police declined to comment Friday beyond issuing a brief statement from Colonel Christopher Mason, who said the department has taken steps to reform, including regular payroll audits and expanding its internal investigations and inspections unit. “The conduct as alleged is unacceptable and does not represent the standards and professionalism expected of Massachusetts State Troopers,” Mason said.

Governor Charlie Baker declined to comment through a spokeswoman.

The indictment states Griffin, Robertson, and three other unnamed troopers would regularly arrive late to, and leave early from, overtime shifts. To hide their absences, the group allegedly submitted identical false timesheets and phony traffic citations.

The scheme dated at least back to 2015 and continued into 2018, prosecutors said, and the five troopers stole more than \$132,000 collectively. Griffin and Robertson allegedly took the biggest hauls of fraudulent overtime pay, \$61,022 and \$31,753, respectively, prosecutors said.

When another overtime scandal first erupted inside the State Police in 2017, members of

the Traffic Program Section took steps to avoid detection by shredding and burning records and forms, according to prosecutors. Robertson ordered a trooper to shred a folder that included incriminating records, the indictment said. Another trooper allegedly took a folder of payroll forms to his home and burned them.

Amid an inquiry about missing forms, Griffin submitted a memo to his superiors that was designed to mislead them, claiming missing forms were “inadvertently discarded or misplaced” during office moves, according to prosecutors.

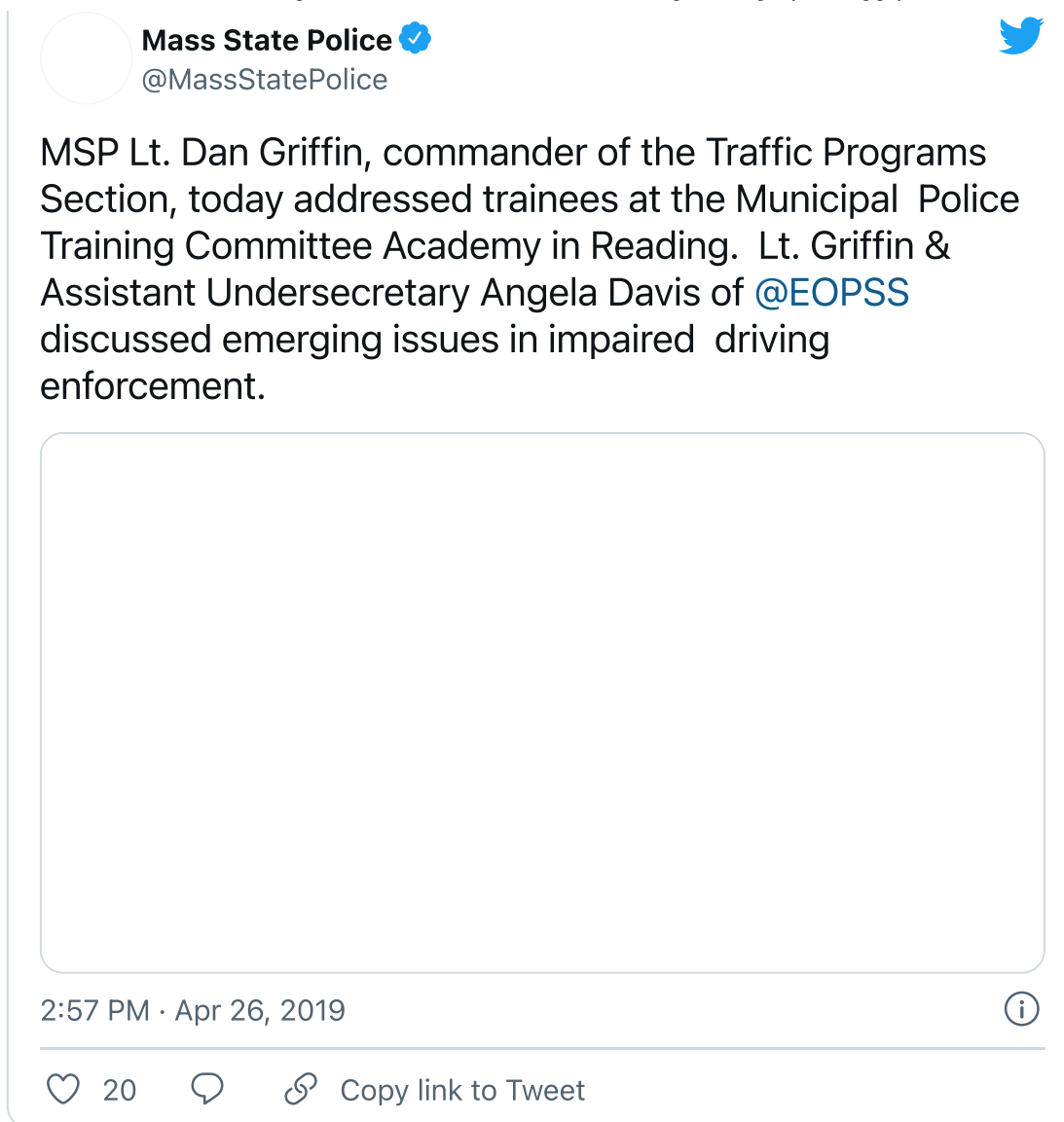
A woman who answered the phone Friday at Griffin’s home declined to comment. Robertson’s attorney Stanley W. Norkunas said, “The judicial process has just started.”

Griffin and Robertson retired in September and filed for pension payments, which have not yet been issued, state retirement board officials said. Griffin applied for higher than normal pension payouts, claiming he suffered injuries on the job, retirement records show.

Both men received a “general discharge” from State Police for retiring amid an internal investigation, according to records obtained by the Globe. A general discharge is the second-worst of four possible discharge statuses issued by the department.

Griffin faced additional charges for allegedly defrauding a private school, siphoning money from a private security side business that he ran, and filing false tax returns, allegedly hiding over \$700,000 from the IRS. The indictment claims Griffin tried to enrich himself in myriad illegal ways.

For example, prosecutors allege Griffin underreported his assets and income to get financial aid from a private school his two children attended in Belmont. In e-mails to the school, Griffin complained the school was penalizing him for being honest about his finances, and accused other families of gaming the system and “hid[ing] monies,” the indictment states.



The alleged overtime fraud outlined Friday follows a similar scandal that erupted in early 2018 when 46 troopers from Troop E were found to have collected large sums of taxpayer dollars for hours they never actually worked. Ten troopers have been criminally charged, nine of whom pleaded guilty. The unit, which primarily patrolled the turnpike, was disbanded soon after those allegations surfaced.

In that case, a federal judge had questioned why prosecutors hadn't pursued more serious criminal conspiracy charges, the type of charges Griffin and Robertson now face.

The Traffic Programs Section has only about a half dozen troopers assigned to the unit at a time, whereas Troop E consisted of about 150 troopers, records show.

Internal investigators at State Police have frequently missed or ignored problems within

the Traffic Programs Section, according to inspection reports obtained by the Globe.

In 2015, a period when troopers from the unit allegedly stole more than \$33,000 in overtime pay, a routine internal State Police audit of the unit found no problems. The inspector, then-Lieutenant Kerry Gilpin wrote that troopers in the unit were doing “an outstanding job” submitting and approving timesheets and other paperwork. Gilpin went on to become State Police colonel for two years before retiring in late 2019 in the wake of several other scandals.

In a routine audit in early 2019, State Police inspectors found members of the unit were improperly and inaccurately recording their hours and work activity, records show. In some cases, they didn’t log the information at all. Timesheets didn’t match up with other paperwork.

The inspection noted: “In the few instances a [daily administrative] journal entry was made the details were insufficient.”

However, the inspector then gave little weight to those findings, writing, “This was likely do [sic] to these deployments occurring outside of normal business hours and the documentation of these events occurring through other forms, documents and processes.”

The report concluded with a recommendation that Griffin and his team do better, and included praise for its leader. “Over the past 18 months, Lieutenant Griffin and his staff have performed admirably in fulfilling their duties.”

Lelling said Friday he still believes State Police are capable of reform and properly policing themselves.

“But they have to have the will to do it,” he said. “Obviously, there’s a question with what happened with the internal affairs apparatus at the State Police ... the State Police and in some other departments, the current internal affairs apparatus has not shown itself to be

enough of a deterrence.”

The overtime funds troopers in the unit allegedly stole came directly from the federal government’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and were intended to improve roadway safety by having police enforce rules around dangerous driving behaviors, such as drunk or distracted driving or people riding in vehicles without wearing a seat belt.

In March, the federal transportation department’s Office of Inspector General announced the launch of a nationwide audit of highway safety grant programs that dole out hundreds of millions of federal dollars each year. In announcing the audit, the federal agency referenced the troopers who were convicted on federal charges in the Troop E scandal.

The OIG was also involved in the probe into the Traffic Programs Section.

The State Police force has been plagued with scandal in recent years, none more high profile than the [Troop E overtime fraud scheme](#).

Investigators had found that troopers regularly wrote phony tickets, falsified timesheets, and destroyed documents to cover up how they had skipped shifts in which they were supposed to have been stopping speeding and aggressive drivers.

The scheme allegedly stretched back more than two decades, and was hatched by top commanders who pushed troopers to write citations under an illegal ticket quota system.

As long as troopers handed in enough tickets to meet the quota, supervisors allegedly turned a blind eye and didn’t require them to actually work their shifts.

The case featured a series of other stunning revelations in the past two-plus years, including the department’s acknowledgement that one year into its own internal audit of the problems, it destroyed key documents that could have shown more wrongdoing.

Several of the troopers implicated in the case have retired and are collecting pensions,

while others remain on the force. It is a common occurrence at the State Police, which currently employs [dozens of troopers](#) — including [top-ranking officers](#) — found by internal investigators to have broken the law.

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