



Bruins 3, Penguins 4, Final

The governor promised State Police reforms. A year later, results are mixed

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, April 26, 2019, 8:48 p.m.



Massachusetts State Police Colonel Kerry Gilpin declined a request to discuss the status of the State Police. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

Massachusetts State Police Colonel Kerry Gilpin and Governor Charlie Baker stood side by side on a stage last April and vowed to reform the state's largest law enforcement agency, which was mired in scandal, its troopers the focus of state and federal criminal probes.

“One of the most critical requirements necessary for us to fulfill our mission is to have the trust and confidence of the citizens we serve,” Gilpin said.

That trust had been broken, Gilpin and Baker said, while unveiling a plan that afternoon to win it back. They pledged increased “efficiency, transparency, and accountability” and outlined initiatives to stanch the corruption that had “tarnished” the department.

Yet, one year later, several of these initiatives are partially, if not entirely, unfulfilled, and a shift in culture at the troubled agency has proved stubbornly elusive.

Although overtime spending dropped departmentwide last year, it was driven in part by a steady reduction in the agency's ranks. Some proposed reforms have suffered setbacks or remain uncertain amid union pushback. And though the agency conducted several internal studies, it also ignored some of the recommendations outlined in these reports.

“We've seen some superficial changes, but there's been nothing done to address the underlying reasons for why this happened,” said Dennis Galvin, a retired State Police major and president of the Massachusetts Association for Professional Law Enforcement, a group that includes active and retired State Police. “The whole thing comes down to supervision and accountability, and if they don't address that, there's going to be more trouble.”

Gilpin, Baker, and public safety secretary Thomas A. Turco III declined requests to discuss the status of the State Police. In an e-mail, a Baker spokeswoman said the governor supports Gilpin's “ongoing comprehensive reforms” and will

continue to work with Gilpin to “increase transparency and enhance oversight at the department.”

Since their [April 2018 press conference](#), Baker and Gilpin have weathered a [steady stream](#) of new police controversies.

Amid each new revelation, aides for Baker and Gilpin have stuck to the same mantra: Reforms are underway. But a closer look at their [pledges](#), now a year out, reveals mixed results.

The agency, citing ongoing criminal investigations, has not released audits of top-paid troopers, despite promises to publish the material quarterly. It also has failed to resolve a longstanding [jurisdiction dispute](#) with Boston police over patrols in the city’s Seaport District, and ignored a [cost-saving recommendation](#) for Massachusetts Turnpike patrols.

Throughout, the State Police have repeatedly flouted the state’s public records law, including withholding internal audits Gilpin authored.

Despite efforts, some of the reforms took hold only temporarily. For example, the department boosted staffing in its internal investigations units, but that has since dropped due to retirements.

On the other hand, Baker and Gilpin have followed through on several promises. They disbanded Troop E, the unit at the center of an overtime fraud and bogus traffic [citation](#) scheme, and transferred its troopers to other units. The agency also created a check-in policy for troopers, which aims to curb no-show shifts.

Another bright spot: State Police are seeking state and national [accreditation](#), which state lawmakers recently [required](#) the department to obtain.

“That’s probably one of the best mechanisms for instituting the changes they want to make and probably more,” said Brenda Bond, a Suffolk University associate professor who specializes in law enforcement organizational change.

Still, with a handful of other pending reforms, uncertainty lingers.

Overall, the department’s payroll dipped slightly in 2018, partially fueled by more than 100 trooper [retirements](#). Department officials [expect payroll to climb](#) this year.

The agency is halfway done adding GPS-tracking technology to its vehicle fleet, but union [complaints](#) pending before the state’s labor relation department could upend the program. Also, a six-month body camera pilot program launched earlier this year requires union buy-in if it’s to be implemented permanently.

Former Boston police commissioner Kathleen O’Toole, whom Gilpin recruited as a consultant last summer, said she has seen “significant progress,” but there’s more to be done.

“Will they accomplish it overnight? No, but I think they’re on the right path,” said O’Toole, who held leadership roles within and overseeing State Police in the 1990s. She also said she’d like the police force to be more transparent and improve their communication with the community.

Gilpin [appointed](#) Kevin M. Burke, the state’s former public safety secretary, to investigate the agency last year amid a [different scandal](#): Top agency officials allegedly ordered troopers to remove embarrassing details from the arrest report of a judge’s daughter.

Burke and a fellow investigator [concluded](#) in their report: “The culture of the Massachusetts State Police must be transformed starting with management.”

In an interview, Burke said the ability to make major change is limited because colonels tend to have short tenures, which often run concurrent with gubernatorial administrations.

In the last two decades, colonels have served, on average, less than three years. Gilpin's tenure [began](#) about 17 months ago.

Under state law, the governor can appoint only internal candidates as colonel. Baker [said last fall](#) he would be open to legislation allowing for outside candidates. But he has been silent on the issue since; no bills have been filed.

Burke said there's a shortage of well-trained leaders, and a lack of unified focus toward a central mission.

"Organizationally they're missing a lot," Burke said. "It goes back 40 years."

There has rarely been investment in initiatives with long-term payoffs, like training, Burke said. Money instead goes to funding wages and contractual obligations for troopers.

"Everybody is so busy with the day-to-day stuff that there hasn't been enough of a broad vision," said Burke, saying the blame is shared among lawmakers, governors, department officials, and union leaders.

Leaders from all corners of law enforcement — [Attorney General Maura Healey](#), a [federal judge](#), the [former](#) head of the [troopers union](#), and several law enforcement [experts](#) — have blamed a pervasive [culture](#) problem as the root of the agency's woes.

Troopers union president Sergeant Mark S. Lynch declined to say whether there's a culture problem, but said changes have been made to increase accountability.

The union itself is under scrutiny by federal prosecutors, who are investigating possible financial improprieties.

While Baker and Gilpin are focused on the future, still-simmering scandals may cause more pain.

Ten troopers have been charged — eight of them have pleaded guilty — with collecting overtime pay for hours they never worked in 2016 and 2015 while assigned to the unit that patrolled the Massachusetts Turnpike. Another 36 troopers have been accused by the department in this scheme, and could face charges.

The problems were found through an investigation the department launched quietly in early 2017 and later expanded under Gilpin following a report by WCVB-TV that exposed signs of overtime fraud.

State Police, along with state and federal prosecutors, are still investigating.

Despite the wide-scale scrutiny on payroll, records show troopers have continued to bump up against, and possibly push past, department limits on hours worked: 16.5 hours in a 24-hour stretch and no more than 85 hours in a week.

A Globe review of timesheets for the department's 20-member Motorcycle Unit found 36 instances during a three-week span in August in which troopers logged more than 16.5 hours in a day. One of them was the supervisor who approved timesheets.

Half of the unit reported working 85 hours or more in one week.

Even so, State Police spokesman David Procopio insisted these troopers complied with department rules, which he said allow for exceptions.

The department audited top-paid troopers agencywide three times since last year. Procopio refused to address whether any violations were spotted.

Procopio said state and federal prosecutors have requested that the agency not release the audits' results.

Last month, minutes after he was [sentenced](#) to a year of supervised release for embezzlement, former trooper Eric Chin put it bluntly: “The State Police has been around for a long time. If anybody thinks that real changes are going to come overnight . . . it’s not going to happen. It’s probably not what the public wants to hear, but that’s what it is.”

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