

Baker names Christopher Mason as new State Police commander

By [Matt Stout](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated November 13, 2019, 5:01 p.m.



Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Mason at the Massachusetts State House with Governor Charlie Baker. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

Governor Charlie Baker on Wednesday named Christopher S. Mason as the new colonel of the Massachusetts State Police, elevating a seasoned detective who investigated homicides on Cape Cod and most recently held the number two job on the force.

Mason, 56, succeeds [Colonel Kerry A. Gilpin](#), whose two-year tenure was largely marked by the fallout from federal and state criminal investigations into overtime fraud

within the department, including newly public allegations that [supervisors regularly ordered rank-and-file troopers](#) to skip overtime shifts that they were paid for.

Appearing at a State House news conference, Mason promised to pursue a series of changes he said will bring more transparency and diversity to a department that has been regularly criticized for lacking both.

“The biggest obstacle always is: Words are hollow. It’s actions that will move the department forward,” Mason said.

Mason is a 26-year department veteran who worked with the Cape and Islands district attorney’s office for 17 years during which he investigated, among other cases, the murder of Christa Worthington, who was found dead in her Truro home in 2002.

Cape and Islands District Attorney Michael O’Keefe called Mason a natural leader.

“He has that intangible quality of leadership and he’s had it since he was a trooper,” said O’Keefe, who added that trait “is going to be very instrumental to getting the State Police back on the right track and staying on the right track.”

Mason, who will take over the department Friday, said he believes that Gilpin set the department on the “right pathway,” but emphasized that he’ll pursue a range of changes.

That includes reshaping training at the State Police Academy to focus less on paramilitary training and more on what he called “modern policing skills,” such as de-escalating situations.

The department will also change its ethics training to focus specifically on the types of issues at the heart of the overtime scandal, he said, as well as expand its legal department to handle the thousands of public records requests it receives each year.

Mason has also been tasked with completing what officials say are ongoing internal investigations the department launched in the wake of the overtime scandal. Mason did

not rule out identifying other problem troopers beyond the 46 the department has already referred to state and federal prosecutors.

“If we find supervisors were complicit in this, then we will pursue that investigation and we will act accordingly,” he said.

Baker said Mason has promised him specifically that he is “going to chase down” the internal probes to completion.

“On the issue of restoring trust, turning the page — however you want to call it — that work has got to get completed,” Baker said Wednesday. “Because I think for a lot of people, that’s a big hanging question out there.”

Baker has said he is open to changing state law to allow his office to tap someone from outside the department to be colonel, and has indicated it will be part of a legislative package he intends to file.

Mason said he understands the arguments for bringing in someone from outside the department’s ranks, but that now wouldn’t be the time.

“I believe strongly that at this time in the State Police history, that it’s important to have somebody from the inside,” Mason said. “I know I’m biased when I say that. But having an understanding and having been involved in the early outset of some of these reforms and having the ability to hit the ground running and drive those forward and complete those investigations, I think is important.”

Mason has served as commander of the department’s detective section and the Division of Investigative Services, and was promoted by Gilpin to deputy superintendent in January.

With his latest promotion, Mason’s salary of \$233,889 will increase to \$241,845.

As colonel, he will direct the department to “immediately review options” for promoting women and minorities within the department, according to Baker’s office.

Eighty-nine percent of the State Police force was white and 94 percent was male as of September 2018, department statistics show. And of 55 people who held posts in the department's six top ranks at the time, 50 were white men and five were white women, including Gilpin.

The department has faced numerous discrimination complaints in recent years, and a federal jury last year found that the State Police [had discriminated against a black recruit](#), denying him entrance to its academy because of his race.

The pledge to improve diversity was met with doubt by State Police Lieutenant Carmelo Ayuso, who is president of the Massachusetts Minority State Police Officers Association.

"We hear that from every colonel that comes in and nothing happens," Ayuso said Wednesday. "It's just rhetoric.

"When it comes to doing anything about the minority issues in the department, nothing gets done," he added. "Our numbers just keep getting smaller."

Proposals crafted late last year as part of a legislative study to try to improve diversity were criticized by Ayuso and others, who said the ideas won't bring enough change.

Ayuso said he wants to see Baker push to get rid of the law that requires the colonel position to be filled by someone from within the department.

"The law needs to change. As long as we keep hiring from within the department, nothing is going to change," he said.

The leadership of the union representing most of the State Police force applauded Baker for picking Mason.

"Colonel Mason's broad experience and outstanding reputation for excellence are well known and deserved," the State Police Association of Massachusetts said in a statement. "We recognize that a strong partnership with the community and the cooperation and trust of those we serve is vital to the performance of modern policing, and we are

committed to implementing the necessary measures to strengthen and build upon this relationship.”

Gilpin, 49, [announced her retirement](#) Nov. 6 after 25 years on the force. She applauded Mason’s selection.

Dennis Galvin, president of the Massachusetts Association for Professional Law Enforcement and a retired State Police major, said Mason’s credentials and leadership experience were impressive.

“His record is good. There’s no question about that,” Galvin said. “But the question is: Will he be given the support from the governor and the secretary of public safety to do what is necessary to make this department effective and to correct the issues that have plagued the department for years?”

John R. Ellement of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Matt Stout can be reached at matt.stout@globe.com. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com.

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