



Bruins 3, Penguins 4, Final

Governor announces changes for scandal-plagued State Police force

Baker wants to strike down a state law barring the governor from hiring an outsider as colonel

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 16, 2020, 12:16 p.m.



Governor Charlie Baker and Colonel Christopher Mason, superintendent of the State Police, held a press conference at the Massachusetts State Police Training Academy on Thursday. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/DAVID L RYAN, GLOBE STAFF

NEW BRAINTREE — Taking aim at corruption and cultural problems that have plagued the State Police force for years, Governor Charlie Baker and State Police Colonel Christopher Mason on Thursday announced a series of policy changes — including a proposal to allow the governor to name its future leader from outside the ranks of the long-troubled law enforcement agency.

The efforts include creating ways to punish troopers more swiftly and severely for misconduct, more stringent ethics training, and additional layers of approval for overtime shifts. But perhaps the most significant was the proposed legislation that would strike down a state law barring the governor from hiring an outsider as colonel — a requirement, critics say, that has exacerbated cultural issues within the 2,100-member police force.

“The current statutes governing the Mass. State Police are out of date and out of step with what is required to run an effective department today,” Baker said at a news conference at the State Police Academy gymnasium, shortly after addressing some 250 new recruits.

Baker has proposed a number of changes within the last two years as case after case of corruption and cover-up have percolated from the police ranks. But those changes have been slow to take hold, and results mixed. Baker provided new details on these efforts — such as plans to beef up the department’s payroll auditing — and pronounced most measures completed, or well underway. The latest proposals are the most bold yet, and directly address some of the most bedeviling problems inside the department.

Dennis Galvin, president of the Massachusetts Association for Professional Law Enforcement and a retired State Police major, applauded the proposals.

“We’re encouraged by this,” said Galvin, who has been critical of the department’s missteps in recent years. “These are more substantive changes than have so far been made, so we’re hoping that this spirit of reform continues.”

Still, Galvin noted, “It took them long enough to do it.” He also suggested the department would benefit from a truly independent review by an outside panel of experts.

Also on Thursday, Baker and Mason unveiled measures to increase the numbers of minorities and women throughout the department, including in the upper ranks, which have historically been dominated by white men. They vowed to make promotions less subjective, create a cadet program, and hire a diversity recruitment officer.

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. Currently, 89 percent of the 2,100-member State Police force is white and 95 percent is male, statistics show.

Baker said his goal is to continue to work toward rebuilding the public’s trust.

”The colonel clearly has his work cut out for him, but his team is making significant progress on this agenda,” Baker said.

When he [took the helm](#) of the agency in November, Mason promised change. He succeeded [Kerry Gilpin](#), who also took over amid tumult, in late 2017, promised change, and went on to lead the department through a rocky two years.

The state’s largest law enforcement agency has been under fire for a [series of controversies](#), including claims of widespread fraud and systemic corruption, complaints about discrimination and diversity, and a variety of crimes carried out by troopers.

The most high-profile case has been a wide-ranging payroll [fraud scandal](#) that has implicated a total of 46 sworn officers within the department. Troopers and [supervisors](#) allegedly collected overtime pay for hours they had never

worked while falsifying documents to cover up their absences from work. Nine former troopers have been convicted in court, and federal and state criminal probes are ongoing.

Thirty-six troopers remain under scrutiny. Mason said internal investigations into those troopers were recently completed. He expects to soon announce additional findings and his recommendations for discipline.

Most of the convicted former troopers avoided prison time and instead were sentenced to probation and ordered to pay back the money they stole. The state has moved to strip pensions away from them and those matters are pending before the state retirement board. Several did not have enough tenure to be pension eligible.

Baker reiterated Thursday that “those found guilty of stealing should lose their pension.”

Several of the newly announced changes deal directly with trooper overtime fraud.

Members who work overtime assignments will now need to get sign-off from higher-level supervisors. The approval will need to come from a captain, a rank that has “no financial stake in these patrols and can provide an objective check and balance,” Mason said. Also, the department will now randomly audit department-wide payroll each week, instead of a quarterly analysis focused just on top earners.

The State Police have the highest average pay per employee of any state agency by a wide margin. [For 2019](#), that average was \$126,929. The next closest agency pay average was more than \$25,000 lower.

Last year, some 325 troopers — about 15 percent of the force — took home \$200,000 or more, records show. Overtime remained a major driver.

The troopers' union, which has faced its own [fraud allegations](#) and other [turmoil](#), last month reached a contract agreement with the state that will give its members modest pay raises.

As part of the deal, the union dropped a lengthy legal [battle](#) with the agency over the implementation of GPS technology that tracks the location of police cruisers. Now, troopers' vehicles are tracked in real time.

Still, the two sides are poised to square off again over plans to deploy cruiser dash cameras and body cameras, another promised reform. Union officials issued a brief statement following Thursday's announcement. "We look forward to reviewing the legislation which we have not yet seen."

Department officials said the new recruit class, now in their second of 23 weeks of training, is believed to be the largest and most diverse pool in State Police history. Recruits sat upright with their hands locked as the governor spoke Thursday inside the academy's campus 20 miles west of Worcester.

"I hope all of you remember," Baker told them, "the very high standards for behavior, work, and collaboration that we're going to expect you to bring to this to succeed in working your way through the academy and joining the team."

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