

# Amid more State Police controversy, Baker, lawmakers point fingers at each other

By **Matt Rocheleau** Updated October 20, 2020, 1:40 p.m.



14coronamain - Gov. Charlie Baker speaks during a press conference regarding Covid-19 updates in the Massachusetts State House in Boston on Oct. 13, 2020. (Chris Van Buskirk/Pool) CHRIS VAN BUSKIRK/POOL

Governor Charlie Baker clashed with legislators on Tuesday over the best way to reform the Massachusetts State Police on the heels of [revelations that dozens of troopers remain on the force despite past illegal conduct](#).

A spokeswoman for Baker called on legislators to act on legislation he submitted nine

months ago aimed at holding law enforcement more accountable. Lawmakers, meanwhile, argued that Baker already has the power to reform the state's largest police force, which has been awash in controversy since an overtime abuse scandal surfaced more than two years ago.

“When you see bad actors that are continually allowed to hold the badge, that needs to be dealt with by management and the administration.” said Senator Paul Feeney, vice chair of the public safety committee. “The buck stops at the top of the administration and that's with the governor's office.”

The back-and-forth came in response to a [Globe report](#) about troopers who have escaped termination despite crimes or serious misconduct, including one trooper who traveled and partied in Las Vegas with people tied to organized crime.

Baker is miffed that police reform legislation remains stalled, according to a statement from his spokeswoman, Sarah Finlaw.

“The administration cannot understand why, despite overwhelming evidence such as this report calling for reforming and strengthening the department's legal authority to discipline troopers, the governor's legislation to do just that has not advanced through the Legislature,” the statement said.

In January, Baker filed [a bill](#) that would allow the State Police to punish troopers more swiftly and severely for misconduct and 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 2,200-member police force.

But legislators bristled at the Republican governor's comments and laid blame for the problems with Baker and Colonel Christopher Mason, Baker's pick to run the department.

Feeney, a Democrat, said that while the Legislature continues to work on important bills to increase accountability in policing, the administration already has tools at its disposal,

such as to discipline officers and refer criminal misconduct to prosecutors, that it has not been using.

“This is a management issue and they’re seeking a legislative solution, and that’s not how this works,” said Feeney, who spoke to the Globe in a phone interview arranged by the office of Senate President Karen Spilka. “If the governor and the administration feel they’re hamstrung in disciplining troopers, well they negotiated the collective bargaining agreement with the troopers.”

Democratic House Speaker Robert DeLeo also took exception with Baker’s comments, saying the governor’s proposed bills fall short of proposals crafted by lawmakers, including pending House legislation that would make it a crime for officers to submit false timesheets, which troopers did in the overtime fraud scandal.

“We look forward to the governor moving beyond the modest reforms reflected in his legislation and supporting the House’s independent commission,” said DeLeo spokeswoman Catherine Williams in a statement.

The Globe reported Sunday that dozens of troopers found by internal investigators to have broken the law remain on the force today. The serious cases of misconduct — including for assault and battery, drunken driving, harassment, and even closely associating with and providing sensitive background check information to known criminals — extend to some of the [top officers](#) in the department.

A review of the department’s internal affairs files showed the agency rarely fires troopers, almost no matter what they have done. Cases involving conduct that is criminal in nature have rarely been referred for prosecution.

The department has faced repeated scandals in recent years. Through much of the turmoil, Beacon Hill had been [relatively quiet](#) regarding the State Police. But in recent months, in part due to a national reckoning over police misconduct, conversations have picked up.

In June, following a national outcry over the death of George Floyd, Baker [unveiled](#) legislation to create a committee that would certify — and, for certain misconduct, decertify — police officers statewide.

The following month, each legislative chamber passed police reform measures of their own.

But since then, [the legislation](#) has been bottled up in closed-door negotiations, along with several other major pieces of legislation. Lawmakers have declined to say where talks stand, in keeping with their self-imposed tradition of secrecy over pending legislation.

The Globe [reported](#) that some legislators believe the bills are being stalled so that incumbents on the ballot this year can avoid having to make difficult votes ahead of Election Day.

Legislative leaders have denied that's the case. They've acknowledged that busy reelection campaigns have slowed progress on pending bills, but they also blamed other factors. Lawmakers said they're trying to negotiate multiple major bills at once, some quite complex, while also trying to hash out a complicated budget during uncertain economic times — and doing it all virtually.

Separately, a spokeswoman for Attorney General Maura Healey said the Globe's report was "highly concerning" and the office has launched a review of internal State Police investigations to determine if further legal action may be warranted.

"We will carefully review all such incidents and we remain committed to prosecuting criminal misconduct within the agency," the spokeswoman, Emalie Gainey, said.

Healey's office said it has been discussing trooper misconduct issues with the State Police since the spring. But the office said it has no timetable for when it expects to finish the review, citing how the process is ongoing and will continue as new cases arise. The office also declined to provide any detailed information about the review, including when it

began and who is in charge as well as whether the office has opened criminal investigations as a result.

The latest revelations about trooper misconduct underscore that the problems at the State Police are [deeply rooted](#), said Senator Barry Finegold.

“These problems are not only about scandals and bad actors, they represent a culture of silence: we have continually seen fellow officers not stepping up and speaking out against officers who don’t act properly,” Finegold, a Democrat, said in a statement. “We have to make sure that law enforcement, who agree to protect and defend the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, are held to a higher standard.”

Representative Russell E. Holmes, a Mattapan Democrat, said instead of pointing fingers at each other, leaders at State Police, Baker’s office, and the Legislature should accept that they all share some responsibility for the agency’s failings — and they should take action, now.

“This has festered underneath the surface for far too long, and the blame should be handed out to everybody,” said Holmes, who urged for the immediate passage of policing reform legislation. “Instead of passing blame around, it’s all of our responsibility, and all of us should be willing now to step into this moment and do what’s right.”

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