

Reforming The Massachusetts State Police With Leadership from the Office of the State Auditor

The Massachusetts State Police (MSP) play a critical role in public safety in our Commonwealth. With more than 1,500 uniformed personnel and 500 civilian support staff, the MSP is the largest law enforcement agency in New England. It is responsible for criminal law enforcement and traffic vehicle regulation across the state, and regularly partners with federal and local law enforcement agencies when called upon to assist with complex and challenging investigations and actions.

Being a State Police Trooper is a difficult job, and troopers put their lives on the line to keep the Commonwealth safe. But the agency as a whole has developed deeply rooted problems that cannot be ignored. It has lost the public's trust. From troopers logging fictitious shifts that went undetected for years, to the destruction of personnel records in a coverup attempt, to trampling civil liberties by improperly accessing confidential information about citizens, the MSP is now seen in the eyes of many Massachusetts residents as an organization rife with corruption and malfeasance. Insights into the internal culture of the MSP have led to troubling conclusions, with allegations of racism and other forms of discrimination, some of which were settled in court, with taxpayers footing the bill. Even under the best of circumstances and with a healthy organizational culture, troopers would face a demanding and high-stress working environment given the requirements of the job. Corruption, nepotism and the diversion of critical resources (e.g., through overtime fraud) only heighten these pressures and stresses. Addressing cultural and organizational issues through reform of the MSP will make it a safer, more welcoming, and more supportive place to work. As a Commonwealth, we owe it to troopers, communities, and residents to hold the MSP to a higher standard.



As Auditor, Chris Will:

- 1. Conduct a targeted 15-point audit of the Massachusetts State Police (MSP)**
- 2. Hold the MSP to the high standard we should expect of New England's largest police force**
- 3. Advance a culture of transparency and accountability in state government by showing that no agency is beyond reform and needed change**

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As State Auditor, Chris Dempsey will conduct a targeted audit of the State Police, with 15 key areas of evaluation and review including, but not limited to, reviews of supervision and accountability systems, administrative controls in payroll and human resources management, assessments of training and promotion criteria and systems, and inquiry into organizational support for the physical, mental, and emotional health of personnel. This proposal highlights the key role that the State Auditor's Office will play -- under Chris Dempsey's leadership -- in reforming the Massachusetts State Police to make it more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive.

A Strong Case for Increased Oversight and Reform

The case for increased oversight and accountability at the MSP is strong. Few, if any, other state agencies of comparable size have been the subject of such a significant number of accusations, legal challenges, and troubling revelations of abuse. Previous reviews and investigations of the MSP have helped to expose a toxic and disturbing culture that has impacted many troopers and all levels of the organization. In March of 2018, following reporting by WCVB "5 Investigates" in the fall of 2017, Attorney General Maura Healey announced that her office would review discrepancies between overtime reports filed by troopers and actual hours worked on patrol. Then-State-Police-Colonel Kerry Gilpin [shared with reporters](#) that at least 20 troopers had filed as many as 100 fictitious shifts in 2016 alone, defrauding taxpayers of hundreds of thousands of dollars. These discrepancies in payroll information led to the arrest of three MSP troopers in June, 2018, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation alleged these troopers defrauded taxpayers and then sought to conceal that fraud by altering the dates and times of tickets. To make matters worse, the agency sought to destroy more than 160 boxes of documents tracking payroll, detail assignments, attendance and personnel records in an effort to cover up the abuse, [according to WBUR](#).

Members of the MSP have abused their privileged access to the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) system for personal matters beyond the scope of law-enforcement business. "I can't tell you how many times I saw troopers run their next-door neighbor through CORI, run their old girlfriends' names, or run someone who they're having a dispute with," said State Trooper Michael Szymanski in 2019. "I've seen a million different guys using CORI inappropriately." [Szymanski was himself reprimanded by the state Board of Bar Overseers](#) for improperly accessing criminal records via the CORI system. While the MSP has reportedly implemented reforms of this system, there is little evidence that other troopers faced repercussions or that the extent of the abuse was fully investigated.

Furthermore, the MSP has long been the subject of numerous lawsuits alleging discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation. [Reporting by the Boston Globe revealed](#) court documents and interviews in which, "dozens of recent lawsuits filed against the department, troopers and civilians say they have endured racial slurs and racist jokes,

homophobic taunts, sexual advances, and lewd remarks,” and determined that taxpayers have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to settle dozens of these lawsuits. This investigation also determined that troopers left the force because of incessant racism, homophobia, and sexism from other officers, with one decorated Black trooper telling the Globe, “I couldn’t stomach it anymore. I left the State Police because my heart was broken.”

These recent headlines have shocked and disturbed many Massachusetts residents and taxpayers, but the problems around a lack of supervision and lax accountability date back decades. For example, a 1996 report by international police experts John Linder and Associates identified a number of cultural issues developing at the MSP. State Police troopers and staff interviewed for that report felt a laxity threatening the MSP core, noting, “A lack of standards applies to all facets of the job;” and that, “Fairness and professionalism are organizational values receding into memory and institutional folklore.”

These reports and others make clear that problems at the State Police go beyond a few bad apples or actors. The agency needs more structural change and reform if it is to live up to the high standards we should have for New England’s largest law-enforcement agency.

The Role of the Office of the State Auditor in MSP Oversight

As the Chief Accountability Officer for Massachusetts state government, the Office of the State Auditor has an essential role to play in assessing the MSP, proposing reforms, and overseeing implementation of needed changes.

The MSP didn’t get to this place on its own. At each step, government officials responsible for providing oversight and accountability of MSP’s operations and culture failed to do their jobs. In the absence of sufficient leadership from Beacon Hill or MSP management, the Auditor’s Office must look at where the MSP’s systems have failed our communities, taxpayers, and troopers themselves. The fifteen targeted components of the audit included below are essential steps on the MSP’s path to reform and cultural change that we know is needed.

While we in Massachusetts must continue to have a deep and serious conversation about the function of police in our society, we should neither want to drive away the officers most disturbed by a broken culture nor create a staffing shortage that leaves residents and communities without essential services. Urgent reform is needed to ensure that good people who want to perform the critical task of policing are not burdened by the internal pressures created by a poorly performing organization. Thorough and persistent reform of the State Police accomplishes multiple goals at once: (1) it honors the service of individual troopers, the overwhelming majority of whom join the force with honorable intentions to protect the Commonwealth, (2) it makes troopers and communities safer by reducing stress and improving performance and culture, (3) it respects taxpayers who expect public dollars to be well spent to keep our communities safe,

and (4) it contributes to an overall culture of transparency and accountability in state government by showing that no agency is beyond reform and needed change.

A Targeted Audit Proposal for Overseeing and Reforming the Massachusetts State Police:

1. Use the powers of the Auditor's Office to compel State Police administration to produce documents and records that have previously been unavailable to the public and media
2. Review human-resource and timekeeping protocols to protect against overtime fraud and other payroll fraud
3. Evaluate basic supervisory functions to maintain high management standards and expectations
4. Assess practices for performance reviews and promotion criteria
5. Ensure the integrity of the hiring process to eliminate bias, nepotism, and favoritism with the goal of hiring a force that reflects the full diversity of the Commonwealth
6. Review curriculum and training standards at the MSP Academy, where Troopers are first exposed to the culture of the organization. Ensure that instructors, curriculum, and trainings are the best available to meet modern standards and expectations of policing
7. Evaluate standards and protocols for supporting the emotional and mental well-being of troopers and staff, especially those in high-stress, high-risk, or emotionally-taxing roles
8. Review the MSP's application for Accreditation status from the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission
9. Investigate evidence-management protocols to ensure accountability and integrity of criminal evidence
10. Develop a comprehensive report on lawsuits, civil actions, and complaints filed by officers and by citizens and residents who have interacted with the State Police, with particular attention paid to allegations of racial or gender-based abuse and the potential for disproportionate enforcement by race and gender
11. Review data on the MSP's traffic stops and arrests, with a particular focus on potential racial disparities

12. Support the State Police Office of Professional Integrity and Accountability to ensure it has the tools and resources needed for internal investigations
13. Investigate the MSP's use and protocols for surveillance systems and databases, including the Commonwealth Fusion Center (CFC) and CORI, to protect civil rights and civil liberties
14. Evaluate the effectiveness of information technology within the Massachusetts State Police, including areas of upgrades to improve management, personnel, and accountability systems in order to improve the delivery of services
15. Make recommendations to advance the MSP's mission as a world-class law-enforcement agency that upholds the highest standards of public integrity and service to the public while also supporting the public servants who work for the agency